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THE

MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES.

A LOVE STORY.

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "NANA," "L'ASSOMMOIR," "HELENE," "MAGDALEN FERAT," "ALBINE; OR, THE ABBE'S TEMPTATION," "THE CONQUEST OF PLASSANS," "POT-BOUILLE," "THE ROUGON-MACQUART FAMILY; OR, MIETTE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "THE MARKETS OF PARIS," "LA CUREE," "MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON."

TRANSLATED BY GEORGE D. COX.

"THE MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES" is a novel of wonderful power, realism and interest; indeed, it is safe to say that its gifted author never wrote a more remarkable work. Thorough originality characterizes every line of it, and every page teems with excitement. From the flight of Blanche de Cazalis with Philippe Cayol in the first chapter to the last sentence in the book there is a constant stream of stirring and unexpected incidents. The flight of the lovers is a pen picture of rare vividness, and all its lurid details remain stamped on the reader's mind. Philippe's arrest is another touch of rare naturalism; it is treated in a style that only a great master of fiction could attain. The trial for abduction, Blanche's perfidy and the struggles of Philippe's upright brother Marius are described in a most absorbing fashion. As in his novels, Zola tells everything, exposing vice in all its hideousness and contrasting it with virtue of the sternest type. The plot is complicated, but is capitally worked out, everything being made clear at last. Of course, "The Mysteries of Marseilles" will be read by everybody.

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Pot-Bouille. *By Emile Zola,* author of "Nana," "L'Assommoir," "Helene," etc.

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THE

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"THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON," "THERESE RAQUIN,"
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"THE ROUGON-MACQUART FAMILY, OR, MIETTE,"
"HELENE; OR, UNE PAGE D'AMOUR,"
"THE CONQUEST OF PLASSANS."

CHAPTER I.

HOW BLANCHE DE CAZALIS FLED WITH PHILIPPE CAYOL.

TOWARDS the close of the month of May, a man about thirty years old was walking rapidly along a path in the Saint-Joseph district, near the Aygalades. He had left his horse in the care of a farmer of the vicinity, and was going in the direction of a large, solidly built square mansion, a sort of country château similar to many found upon the hills of Provence.

He made a turn to avoid the château, and seated himself in the midst of a grove of pines which stretched out behind the dwelling. There, putting aside the

branches, he uneasily and excitedly scanned the pathways, seeming to be impatiently awaiting some one. At times, he arose and walked a few steps; then he sat down again, all of a tremble.

This man, tall and strange looking, wore large black side-whiskers. His long face, full of energetic features, possessed a sort of violent and fiery beauty. Suddenly his eyes softened and his strong, thick lips assumed a tender smile. A young girl had just quitted the château, and, bending as if for concealment, was hastening in the direction of the grove of pines.

Panting and rosy, she came beneath the trees. She was scarcely sixteen. Amid the blue ribbons of her straw hat, her youthful visage smiled with a joyous and frightened air. Her flaxen locks fell over her shoulders; her little hands, pressed against her bosom, strove to calm the bounds of her heart.

"How long you have kept me waiting, Blanche," said the young man. "I had given up all hope of seeing you."

And he aided her to seat herself beside him on the moss.

"Pardon me, Philippe," answered the young girl. "My uncle has gone to Aix to purchase a property; but I could not get rid of my governess."

She abandoned herself to the clasp of him she adored, and the two lovers indulged in one of those long chats so silly and so sweet. Blanche was a big baby who played with her admirer as she would have played with a doll. Philippe, ardent and mute,

embraced and looked at the young girl with all the transports of ambition and love.

And, as they sat thus, oblivious of the world, they raised their heads and saw that some peasants, who were passing along a neighboring path, were staring and laughing at them. Blanche, startled, drew away from her lover.

"I am lost," said she, growing deadly pale. "Those men will tell my uncle. Ah! in pity save me, Philippe!"

At this cry, the young man arose with a hasty movement.

"If you wish me to save you," replied he, impetuously, "you must marry me. Come, let us fly together. To-morrow, your uncle will sanction our marriage, and we can enjoy our tenderness forever!"

"Fly—fly," repeated the girl. "Ah! I have not the courage. I am too weak, too timid!"

"I will sustain you, Blanche. We will live a life of love!"

Blanche, without comprehending, without replying, allowed her head to sink upon Philippe's shoulder.

"Oh! I am afraid, I am afraid of the convent," resumed she, in a low tone. "You will love me always?"

"Yes, for I adore you! See, I am on my knees!"

Then, closing her eyes, abandoning herself to her fate, Blanche ran down the hill, leaning on Philippe's arm. As she departed, she gave a last look at the mansion she had quitted, and keen emotion brought great tears into her eyes.

A moment of heedlessness and terror had sufficed to cast her into her lover's arms, crushed and trusting. She loved Philippe with all the new-born ardor of her young blood and with all the madness of her inexperience. She escaped like a school-girl; she went voluntarily, without reflection, regardless of the consequences of her flight. And Philippe led her away, intoxicated with his victory, trembling to feel her walk and pant at his side.

The young man wished to hasten to Marseilles and procure a hackney-coach. But he was afraid to leave Blanche alone upon the highway, and preferred to go on foot with her as far as his mother's country-house. They were a league away from that country-house, which was situated in the district of Saint-Just.

Philippe was forced to abandon his horse, and the two lovers stoutly began their walk. They traversed meadows, cultivated lands and groves of pines, striking across the fields and hurrying onward. It was about four o'clock. The sun, of a glowing yellow, threw before them broad sheets of light. And they hastened forward in the warm air, beneath the heat of the blue sky, urged on by the madness which was gnawing at their hearts. As they passed, the peasants raised their heads and watched their flight with astonishment.

It did not take them an hour to reach the country-house of Philippe's mother. Blanche, worn out, sat down upon a stone bench at the door, while the young man went to procure a priest and send away those who might prove troublesome. Then he returned with the

priest and took the young girl into his mother's house, where they were married, the man of God exacting a solemn promise from Philippe that, as soon as the civil ceremony could be performed, the nuptial vows should be renewed in church. The priest blessed the newly-wedded pair and departed. Philippe had asked Ayasse, a gardener who was that day working for his mother, to go to Marseilles and find a hackney-coach.

The two lovers were in the fever of their flight. While awaiting the hackney-coach, they remained silent and anxious. Philippe had seated Blanche in a little chair; kneeling before her, he gazed at her a long while and reassured her by gently kissing the hand she abandoned to him.

"You cannot continue to wear that light dress," said he, at last. "How would you like to put on men's clothes?"

Blanche smiled. She felt an infantile joy at the thought of disguising herself.

"My brother is of short stature," continued Philippe. "You shall wear his garments."

It was rare sport. The young girl drew on the pantaloons, laughing heartily. She was charmingly awkward, and Philippe greedily kissed the blushes of her cheeks. When she was dressed, she had the air of a little man, a boy of twelve. She had all the trouble in the world to keep her flood of hair in her hat, and her lover's hands trembled as they tucked in the rebellious curls.

Ayasse at length returned with the hackney-coach.

He consented to receive the two fugitives at his domicile at Saint-Barnabé. Philippe took all the money he possessed, and the three quitted the country-house and entered the vehicle.

They stopped the hackney-coach at the bridge of Jarret, and went on foot to Ayasse's dwelling. Philippe had resolved to pass the night in this retreat.

Twilight had come. Transparent shadows fell from the pale sky, and biting odors mounted from the earth, still warm with the sun's last rays. Then a vague fear took possession of Blanche. When, in the growing night, in the voluptuousness of the evening, she found herself alone with her lover, all her terrified young girl's reserve awoke, and she quivered, seized with an unknown dread. She abandoned herself; she was happy and terrified at giving herself up wholly to Philippe. She grew faint; she strove to gain time.

"Listen," said she: "I wish to write to the Abbé Chastanier, my confessor. He will see my uncle, will obtain my pardon from him and will, perhaps, induce him to sanction our marriage. It seems to me that I should tremble less had I his consent."

Philippe smiled at the tender innocence of the last remark.

"Write to the Abbé Chastanier," answered he. "I will acquaint my brother with our retreat. He will come to-morrow and bear your letter."

Then, the night came on, lukewarm and voluptuous. In the sight of Heaven, Blanche was Philippe's wife. She had given herself away, she had not uttered a cry

of revolt; she had sinned through ignorance, as Philippe had sinned through ambition and love. Ah! that terrible flight! It was destined to strike the two lovers with misery and give them a world of suffering and regret.

It was thus that Blanche de Cazalis fled with Philippe Cayol one fine evening in May.

CHAPTER II.

MARIUS CAYOL.

MARIUS CAYOL, the brother of Blanche's husband was about twenty-five years of age. He was short, thin and of unobtrusive bearing. His yellowish face, pierced with long and narrow black eyes, lighted up at times with a good-natured smile of devotedness and resignation. He walked, a trifle bent, with infantile hesitation and timidity. When the hatred of evil, the love of right, caused him to straighten up, he became almost handsome.

He had assumed all the hard tasks of the family, allowing his brother to obey his ambitious and impassioned instincts. He crouched beside him, saying, as a matter-of-course, that he was ugly and ought to remain in his ugliness; he added that it was pardonable in Philippe to love to display his lofty stature and the pronounced beauty of his visage. But, on occasion, he showed severity towards that grown-up unruly child, who was his elder and to whom he gave the advice and tenderness of a father.

Their mother, a widow, was without fortune. She lived with difficulty on the wreck of a dowry which her husband had impaired in trade. This money, invested with a banker, gave her a small income which

enabled her to educate her two sons. But, when the children had grown up, she showed them her empty hands and brought them face to face with the struggles of life.

The two brothers, thrown thus amid the turmoil of existence, urged on by their different temperaments, took two opposite routes.

Philippe, who had the appetites of wealth and freedom, could not bend himself to work. He wished to gain fortune by a single stroke; he dreamed of making a rich marriage. That was, in his view, an excellent expedient, a speedy way of acquiring an income and a pretty wife. Then he lived in the sunshine; he transformed himself into a lover and even became somewhat of a high liver. He experienced the infinite enjoyment of being finely dressed, of promenading in Marseilles his elegant rudeness, his garments of an original cut, and his glances and words of love. His mother and brother, who indulged him, strove to minister to his caprices. But Philippe acted in good faith: he adored women; it seemed to him perfectly natural to be loved and abducted some fine day by a noble, rich and beautiful young girl.

Marius, while his brother was displaying his good looks, had entered in the capacity of clerk the establishment of M. Martelly, a ship-owner who dwelt in the Rue de la Darse. He was satisfied in the gloom of his office; his whole ambition consisted in gaining a modest competence, in living quietly and unknown. Besides, he felt a secret delight when he aided his

mother or his brother. The money he made was dear to him, for he could give it away, make people happy with it and himself taste the profound bliss of devotedness. He had taken the straight road in life, the rugged pathway which leads to peace, joy and dignity.

He had gone to his office when he received the letter in which his brother announced to him his flight and marriage with Mademoiselle de Cazalis. He was seized with dolorous astonishment; he sounded at a glance the abyss into the depths of which the two lovers had cast themselves. He went with the utmost haste to Saint-Barnabé.

The dwelling of the gardener Ayasse had before the door an arbor which formed a little bower; two large mulberry trees, trimmed in the shape of a parasol, stretched out their knotty branches and threw their shadows upon the threshold. Marius found Philippe beneath the arbor, gazing with uneasiness and love at Blanche de Cazalis, seated beside him; the young girl, already weary, was plunged in the oppression of first cares and first delights.

The interview was painful, full of anguish and shame. Philippe had arisen.

"Do you blame me?" asked he, offering his hand to his brother.

"Yes, I blame you," answered Marius, emphatically. "You have committed a rash action. Pride has carried you away and love ruined you. You have not reflected upon the evils you are about to draw down upon your family and yourself."

Philippe showed signs of rebellion.

"You are afraid," said he, bitterly. "I have not calculated; I loved Blanche and Blanche loved me. I said to her: 'Will you be my wife?—will you come with me?' and she came. That's the whole story. Neither of us is culpable."

"Why do you tell an untruth?" resumed Marius, with greater severity. "You are not a child. You well know that your duty was to defend this young girl against herself; you should have stopped her on the brink of the gulf, prevented her from following you. Ah! don't talk to me of love. I know only justice and honor."

Philippe smiled disdainfully. He drew Blanche upon his bosom.

"My poor Marius," said he, "you are a good fellow, but you have never adored a woman; you know nothing of love's fever. Behold my defence."

And he allowed himself to be embraced by Blanche, who clung to him tremblingly. The unfortunate girl felt that her only hope now was in this man. She had married him, she belonged to him; she had followed him as her sovereign master. Now she adored him like a slave; she crawled towards him, loving and timid.

Marius, in despair, comprehended that he would gain nothing by talking wisdom to the newly wedded couple. He resolved to act by himself; he wished to know all the facts of the case. Philippe answered his questions with docility.

"I have been acquainted with Blanche nearly eight months," said he. "I saw her for the first time at a public fête. She smiled at the crowd, and I thought her smile was addressed to me. From that day I loved her; I sought every occasion to approach her, to talk to her."

"Did you not write to her?" asked Marius.

"Yes, many times."

"Where are your letters?"

"She burned them. Each time I bought a bouquet of Fine, the flower-girl of the Cours Saint-Louis, and slipped my letter among the flowers. The milkmaid Marguerite took the bouquets to Blanche."

"And your letters remained unanswered?"

"At first, Blanche refused the flowers. Then she accepted them; at last, she replied to me. I was mad with love. I dreamed of marrying Blanche, of adoring her forever."

Marius shrugged his shoulders. He drew Philippe a few paces away and there continued the conversation with more firmness in his voice.

"You are an imbecile or a liar," said he, calmly; "you know that M. de Cazalis, a deputy, a millionaire and the all-powerful master in Marseilles, would never have given his niece in marriage to Philippe Cayol, poor, untitled and a republican as the climax of vulgarity. Admit that you have counted upon the scandal attending your flight to force the uncle to give you Blanche's hand."

"And what if I have!" responded Philippe, impet-

uously. "Blanche loves me; I did not force her to act against her will. She has freely chosen me for her husband."

"Yes, yes, I am aware of that. You repeat it too often for me not to know what I should believe in the premises. But you have not thought of M. de Cazalis' anger; that anger will fall terribly on you and your family—I know the man; this very evening he will have displayed his outraged pride throughout all Marseilles. The best thing you can do will be to take the young girl back to Saint-Joseph."

"No, I will not, I will not. Blanche would never dare to return home. She was in the country scarcely a week; I saw her as often as twice a day in a little grove of pines; we enjoyed in peace the freedom of the fields. Her uncle knew nothing, and the blow must have been severe for him. We cannot present ourselves at this moment."

"Well, listen: give me the letter for the Abbé Chastanier. I will see that priest; if necessary, I will go with him to M. de Cazalis. We must stifle the gossip. I have a task to accomplish, the task of repairing your error. Swear to me that you will not leave this house, that you will await here my orders, my prayers."

"I promise you that I will wait, if no danger threatens me."

Marius took Philippe's hand and looked him squarely in the face.

"Love that child well," said he, in a deep voice,

pointing to Blanche; "you can never repair the injury you have done her."

He was about departing when Mademoiselle de Cazalis advanced. She clasped her hands supplicatingly, forcing back her tears.

"Monsieur," stammered she, "if you see my uncle, tell him that I love him. I am married. I wish to remain Philippe's wife and return to our house with him.

Marius bowed calmly.

"Hope," said he.

And he went away, moved and troubled, knowing that he had deceived her and that hope was out of the question.

CHAPTER III.

THE ABBÉ CHASTANIER.

MARIUS, on arriving at Marseilles, hastened to the Saint-Victor Church to which the Abbé Chastanier was attached. Saint-Victor is one of the oldest churches in Marseilles; its black, lofty and embattled walls make it look like a fortress; one might think that it was fashioned entirely with ax strokes by the rude people of the port, who have a special veneration for it.

The young man found the Abbé Chastanier in the sacristy. This priest was a tall old man, with a long, thin face as white as wax; his sad and humble eyes had the vague fixedness of suffering and poverty. He had returned from a burial and was slowly removing his surplice.

His history was brief and sorrowful. The son of peasants, as mild and innocent as a child, he had taken holy orders, urged on by his mother's pious wishes. In becoming a priest, he had wished to perform an act of humility, of entire devotion. He believed, in the simplicity of his soul, that a minister of God ought to shut himself up in the infinitude of the divine love, renounce the ambition and intrigues of this world and live in the depths of a sanctuary,

pardoning sins with one hand and distributing alms with the other.

Ah! the poor abbé! They showed him that simple souls are good only to suffer and remain in the shade! He soon learned that ambition is a sacerdotal virtue, and that young priests frequently love God for the worldly favors distributed by His church. He saw all his seminary comrades use their nails and teeth, and tear off here and there strips of silk and lace. He witnessed these private struggles, these secret intrigues, which make a diocese a little turbulent kingdom. As he remained humbly upon his knees, did not seek to please the ladies, demanded nothing and appeared stupidly pious, they threw him a miserable benefice as one casts a bone to a dog.

He remained thus more than forty years in a small village, situated between Aubagne and Cassis. His church was a sort of barn, whitewashed and glacially bare; in the winter, when the wind broke one of the window panes, the good God was cold for many weeks, as the poor curé did not always possess the few sous required to restore the glass. But he never complained; he lived peacefully in poverty and solitude; he even felt a deep joy in suffering, in feeling himself the brother of the beggars of his parish.

He was sixty when one of his sisters, who was a workwoman at Marseilles, grew infirm. She wrote to him and begged him to come to her. The old priest devoted himself so far as to ask his bishop for a little corner in one of the city churches. He was kept wait-

ing for this little corner several months, and finally was called to Saint-Victor. He was destined to do there, so to speak, all the heavy work, all the labors to which but little fame and profit were attached. He prayed over the coffins of the poor and took them to the cemetery; he even served as sexton upon occasion.

It was then that he began to suffer in earnest. While in his desert, he had been allowed to be simple, poor and old at his ease. Now, he felt that his poverty and innocence were considered a crime, and his heart was torn when he comprehended that there could be servants in the church. He saw plainly that he was looked upon with derision and pity. He bowed his head still lower, made himself more humble and wept to feel his faith shaken by the acts and words of the worldly priests who surrounded him.

Happily, in the evening, he had comfortable hours. He took care of his sister; he consoled himself in his way by devoting himself. He surrounded the poor infirm woman with a thousand little satisfactions. He took refuge beside her and lost himself in his tenderness. Then another joy came to him: M. de Cazalis, who distrusted young abbés, chose him to be the director of his niece. The old priest had hitherto taken charge of no penitent and very rarely confessed any one; he was moved to tears by the proposition of the deputy and questioned him; he loved Blanche as if she had been his own child.

Marius gave him the young girl's letter and watched his face to see what emotions that letter would excite

in him. He saw keen grief paint itself there. But the priest did not seem to experience that stupor caused by overwhelming and unexpected news, and Marius thought that Blanche, in confessing herself to him, had avowed the relations existing between her and Philippe.

"You have done well to count upon me, Monsieur," said the Abbé Chastanier to Marius. "But I am very weak and awkward. I should have shown more energy."

The head and hands of the poor man had that gentle and sad trembling peculiar to old people.

"I am at your disposal," continued he. "How can I aid the unhappy child?"

"Monsieur," answered Marius, "I am the brother of the young fool who has fled with and wedded Mademoiselle de Cazalis, and I have sworn to repair the error, to stifle the talk. Will you unite with me? The young girl is lost if her uncle has already handed the case over to justice. Go to him, try to quiet his anger and tell him his niece is about to be restored to him."

"Why did you not bring the child with you? I know the violence of M. de Cazalis; he will desire certainties."

"It is that very violence which has frightened my brother. But we cannot reason now. The facts accomplished overwhelm us. Rest assured that I am as indignant as you are, and that I fully realize my brother's wretched action. But, in mercy, let us

hasten. Afterwards, we will speak of justice and right."

"It is well," said the abbé, simply. "I will go with you."

They passed along the Boulevard de la Corderie and reached the Cours Bonaparte, where was situated the deputy's city residence. M. de Cazalis, the day after the flight, had returned to Marseilles, in the morning, a prey to terrible anger and despair.

The Abbé Chastanier stopped Marius at the door of the house.

"Do not enter," said he. "Your visit might, perhaps, be regarded as an insult. Let me act and wait for me."

Marius, for a whole hour, walked the pavement excitedly. He would have preferred to enter, explain the facts himself and ask pardon in Philippe's name. But, while the misfortune of his family was being agitated in that house, he was forced to remain where he was, idle and impatient, in all the anguish of waiting.

At last the Abbé Chastanier appeared. He had been weeping; his eyes were red, his lips quivering.

"M. de Cazalis would listen to nothing," said he, in a troubled voice. "I found him in a blind rage. He has already been to the Procureur du Roi."

What the poor priest did not say was that M. de Cazalis received him with the bitterest reproaches, venting his anger upon him and accusing him, in his fury, of having given evil counsel to his niece.

The abbé bent before him; he almost went upon his knees, not defending himself, but asking pity for others.

"Tell me all," cried Marius, in despair.

"It seems," replied the priest, "that the peasant with whom your brother left his horse guided M. de Cazalis in his investigations. This morning a complaint was made, and searches have been instituted at your residence in the Rue Sainte and at your mother's country-house in the district of Saint-Just."

"My God! my God!" groaned Marius.

"M. de Cazalis swears that he will crush your family. I vainly strove to bring him to more merciful feelings. He talks of arresting your mother."

"My mother! Why?"

"He claims that she is an accomplice, that she aided your brother to abduct Mademoiselle Blanche."

"What is to be done—how is the falsity of all this to be proven? Ah! wretched Philippe! This will cause our mother's death."

And Marius began to sob in his clasped hands. The Abbé Chastanier saw his despair with affecting pity; he understood the tenderness and integrity of this poor fellow who wept in the open street.

"Courage, my child," said he.

"You are right, father," cried Marius; "it is courage that I must have. I was a coward this morning. I should have torn the young girl from Philippe's arms and brought her back to her uncle. A voice told me to do this act of justice, and I am punished for

not having heeded that voice. They spoke to me of their love and marriage. I allowed myself to be softened."

They were silent for a moment.

"Listen," said Marius, suddenly: "come with me—we two will have sufficient strength to separate them."

"So be it," answered the Abbé Chastanier.

And, without even thinking to take a carriage, they followed the Rue Breteuil, the Quai du Canal, the Quai Napoléon, and ascended the Cannebière. They walked with rapid strides, without speaking.

As they reached the Cours Saint-Louis, a clear voice made them turn their heads. It was Fine, the flower-girl, who was calling Marius.

Joséphine Cougourdan, who was called familiarly by the caressing diminutive of Fine, was one of those dark children of Marseilles, short and plump, whose fine and regular features have preserved all the delicate purity of the Greek type. Her round head rose above slightly sloping shoulders; her pale face between the bands of her black hair expressed a sort of disdainful mockery; there was a passionate energy in her great sombre eyes which a smile now and then softened. She might have been from twenty-two to twenty-four years old.

At fifteen she had been left an orphan, burdened with the support of a brother not more than ten. She had stoutly continued her mother's trade, and, three days after the funeral, still all in tears, was seated in a kiosk of the Cours Saint-Louis, making and selling bouquets as she uttered heavy sighs.

The little flower-girl soon became the spoiled child of Marseilles. She had the popularity of youth and grace. Her flowers, people said, had a sweeter and more penetrating perfume than others. The gallants thronged about her; she sold them her roses, her violets and her pinks. Thus she was enabled to bring up her brother Cadet and place him, at the age of eighteen, in the employ of a master porter.

The two young folks dwelt upon the Place aux Œufs, in the heart of the popular quarter. Cadet was now a tall fellow who worked on the wharves; Fine, developed, embellished and become a woman, had the lively manners and nonchalant cajolery of the Marseillaises, and reigned, by virtue of her beauty, over all the girls of the people, her companions.

She knew the Cayols from having sold them flowers, and spoke to them with that tender familiarity imparted by the warm air and the soft dialect of Provence. Besides, if all must be told, Philippe of late had so frequently bought roses of her that at last she had grown to feel little thrills in his presence. The young man, a lover by instinct, laughed with her, stared at her so intently as to make her blush and threw her a fragment of a declaration as he passed, all this that he might not lose the habit of loving. And the poor child, who until then had terribly maltreated lovers, allowed herself to be caught by this game. At night she dreamed of Philippe; she asked herself with anguish where all the flowers she sold him could go to.

When Marius stepped up to her, he found her blushing and troubled. She was half hidden behind her bouquets. She looked adorably fresh beneath the large lappets of her little lace cap.

"Monsieur Marius," said she, in a hesitating voice, "is it true that your brother has fled with a young lady, as they have been repeating around me since morning?"

"Who says that?" asked Marius, quickly.

"Everybody. It is the general talk."

As the young man seemed to be as much troubled as she and as he remained silent, Fine continued, with a slight bitterness:

"I have often been told that M. Philippe was inconstant. He spoke too sweetly not to lie."

She was on the point of weeping, but forced back her tears. Then, with dolorous resignation, she added, in a milder tone:

"I see clearly that you are in trouble. If you have need of me, come to me."

Marius looked her in the face and thought he understood the anguish of her heart.

"You are a good girl," cried he. "I thank you and, perhaps, may accept your services."

He gave her hand a strong grasp, as he would have done with a comrade, and hastened to rejoin the Abbé Chastanier, who was waiting for him on the edge of the sidewalk.

"We have no time to lose," said he to the priest. "The rumor of the flight is spreading throughout Marseilles. Let us take a hackney-coach."

It was night when they arrived at St.-Barnabé. They found only the wife of the gardener Ayasse, knitting in a low room. This woman tranquilly informed them that the gentleman and the young lady had grown afraid and departed on foot in the direction of Aix. She added that they had taken her son to act as their guide among the hills.

So the last hope was destroyed. Marius, overwhelmed, returned to Marseilles, without hearing the Abbé Chastanier's words of encouragement. He was thinking of the fatal consequences of Philippe's folly; he was protesting against the misfortunes which threatened his family.

"My child," said the priest on quitting him, "I am but a poor man. Dispose of me. I am going to pray."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW M. DE CAZALIS AVENGED HIS NIECE'S RUNAWAY.

THE lovers had fled on Wednesday. The following Friday all Marseilles knew of the affair; the babbling women at the doors ornamented the recital with the most unheard-of commentaries; the nobility were indignant and the citizens made merry over the matter. M. de Cazalis, in his rage, had neglected nothing to augment the noise and make of his niece's flight a frightful scandal.

Clear-sighted people easily guessed the reason of all this anger. M. de Cazalis, deputy of the opposition, had been named at Marseilles by a majority composed of republicans, priests and nobles. Devoted to the legitimist cause, bearing one of the most ancient names of Provence, and bowing humbly before the all-powerful influence of the church, he had felt deep repugnance at flattering the liberals and at accepting their voices. These people, in his view, were clowns and servants who ought to be whipped in public. His indomitable pride suffered at the thought of descending to their level.

He was, however, forced to submit. The republicans placed a high value on their services; once, as a show

of disdaining their aid was made, they spoke of embarrassing the election, of causing one of their own number to be named. M. de Cazalis, driven by the circumstances of the case, shut up all his hatred in the depths of his heart, promising himself to be avenged some day. Then ensued shameful intrigues; the clergy took the field, votes were snatched right and left, and, thanks to a thousand reverences and a thousand promises, M. de Cazalis was elected.

And now Philippe Cayol, one of the chiefs of the liberal party, had fallen into his hands. At last he could satisfy his hatred upon one of those clowns who had bargained with him for his election. This man should pay for all; his family should be ruined and crushed; and, as for him, he should be cast into prison, he should be precipitated from the height of his dream of love upon the straw of a dungeon.

What! a common citizen had dared to let himself be loved by the niece of a Cazalis! He had borne her away with him, and now they were running about the highways, playing love's truant. It was a fact that should be made widely known. A man without standing would, perhaps, have preferred to stifle the matter, conceal the deplorable circumstance as much as possible, but a Cazalis, a deputy and a millionaire, had enough influence and pride to cry aloud, without blushing, the shame of his family.

What mattered the fate of a young girl! Everybody might know that Blanche de Cazalis had been the friend of Philippe Cayol, but nobody, at all events,

should say that she was his wife, that she had made a mésalliance by marrying a poor devil without a title. Pride desired that the child should remain disgraced and that her disgrace should be placarded upon the walls of Marseilles.

M. de Cazalis caused to be posted at the corners of the city streets bills in which he promised a reward of ten thousand francs to whoever should bring him his niece and Philippe bound hand and foot. When one loses a blooded dog, one advertises it thus by means of posters.

Among the high classes the matter was noised about with still greater violence. M. de Cazalis exhibited his fury everywhere. He called into requisition all the influence of his friends the priests and nobles. As the guardian of Blanche, who was an orphan and whose fortune he had charge of, he stimulated the investigations of justice and made preparations for the criminal trial. He appeared to be making every effort to give the greatest publicity possible to the free spectacle which was on the eve of commencing.

One of the first steps taken by M. de Cazalis had been to cause the arrest of Philippe Cayol's mother. When the Procureur du Roi presented himself at her house, the poor woman's only answer to all his questions was that she knew not what had become of her son. Her trouble, her anguish and her maternal fears, which made her hesitate, were considered as proofs of complicity. They imprisoned her, seeing in her a hostage and hoping, perhaps, that her son would deliver himself up to free her.

At the news of his mother's arrest, Marius was driven wild. He knew that her health was not good, and his terrified imagination pictured her in the depths of a bare and icy cell; she would die there; she would be tortured there by all the anguish of misery and despair.

Marius was himself disturbed for a moment; but his firm responses and the bail his employer, the ship-owner Martelly, offered to enter for him saved him from imprisonment. He wished to remain free to work for the safety of his family.

Little by little, his just mind saw the facts clearly. At first, he had been overwhelmed by Philippe's culpability and had distinguished only his brother's irreparable error; then he had humbled himself, thinking solely of calming Blanche's uncle and giving him every possible satisfaction.

But before the rigor of M. de Cazalis, before the gossip which roused his indignation, Marius had revolted. He had seen the fugitives, he knew that Blanche had followed Philippe of her own free will and he was enraged to hear his brother accused of abduction. Abuse was poured into his ear: Philippe was called a scoundrel and a wretch; his mother experienced no better treatment. At length, the knowledge of the truth forced him to defend the lovers, to take the part of the culprits against justice itself.

Besides, M. de Cazalis' noisy complaints disgusted him. He said that genuine grief was more silent, and that an affair in which a young girl's fate was at

stake did not empty itself thus in the public street. And he said this, not because he desired to see his brother escape punishment, but because his delicacy was hurt by all this publicity given to a child's misfortune. Further, he fully understood the aim of M. de Cazalis' anger: in striking Philippe, the deputy would strike the clown and the republican, rather than the abductor.

Thus Marius grew angry in his turn. They insulted him through his family, they imprisoned his mother, they tracked his brother like a wild beast, they dragged his dearest affections in the mud and accused them in bad faith and passion. Then, he rose up. The culprit was no longer only the ambitious lover who had fled with a rich young girl, the culprit was also the man who had aroused Marseilles, and who was about to use his overwhelming power to gratify his pride. Since justice charged itself with punishing the first, Marius swore that he would punish the second sooner or later, and that, while awaiting vengeance, he would embarrass his projects and strive to neutralize his influence as a wealthy and titled man.

From that moment, he displayed a feverish energy; he devoted himself wholly to the safety of his brother and his mother. The worst of it was that he could not discover what had become of Philippe. Two days after the flight, he had received a letter from him, in which the fugitive begged him to send him a thousand francs to supply the necessities of travel. This letter was dated at Lambesc.

Philippe had found hospitality there for a few days at the house of M. de Girousse, an old friend of his family. M. de Girousse, the son of a former member of the Parliament of Aix, was born in the midst of revolution; from his first breath, he had inhaled the burning air of '93, and his blood had always retained a little of the revolutionary fever. He was ill at ease in his hôtel, situated upon the Cours at Aix; the nobility of that town seemed to him to have such outrageous pride and such deplorable inertia that he had passed a harsh judgment on them and preferred to live far from them; his equitable mind and his love of justice and toil had compelled him to accept the fatal march of the times, and he had freely offered his hand to the people, he had accommodated himself to the new tendencies of modern society; he had dreamed for an instant of establishing a manufactory and giving up his title of comte to assume the title of artisan. He felt that there was no longer any nobility but the nobility of toil and talent. Hence he preferred to live alone, removed from his equals; he inhabited, for the greater part of the year, a property he owned near the little town of Lambesc. It was there that he received the fugitives.

Marius was disheartened by Philippe's demand. His savings did not amount to six hundred francs. He went among his friends and strove vainly for two days to borrow the rest of the sum asked for.

As he was despairing one morning, he saw Fine enter his apartment. He had confided, the day before,

his trouble to the young girl, whom, since Philippe's flight, he met everywhere upon his path. She incessantly asked him for news of his brother, and always wanted to know if the young lady was still with him.

Fine placed five hundred francs on a table.

"There," said she, blushing. "You can return it to me later. It is some money I put aside to redeem my brother in case he should be drawn as a conscript."

Marius declined to accept.

"You are making me lose time," resumed the young girl, with charming roughness. "I must return immediately to my bouquets. But, if you will permit me, I will come every morning to ask you the news."

And she ran away. Marius sent the thousand francs. Then he learned nothing further; he lived for two whole weeks in complete ignorance of what was taking place. He knew that they were tracking Philippe more eagerly than ever, and that was all. He paid no attention to the grotesque or frightful rumors current on the streets. He had enough terrors of his own, without allowing himself to be frightened by the gossip of a city.

Never had he suffered so much. Anxiety filled his mind almost to bursting; the slightest sound terrified him; he listened constantly, as if he expected to hear bad news. He learned that Philippe had been to Toulon and had narrowly escaped arrest there. The fugitives, the report said, had afterwards returned to Aix. There all trace of them was lost; had they attempted to cross the frontier, or, were they hidden among the hills? No one knew.

Marius was the more disturbed because he had been forced to neglect his work at the office of the ship-owner Martelly. If he had not considered himself nailed to his desk by duty, he would have hastened to Philippe's aid and personally looked after his safety. But he dared not quit a house where he was so much needed. M. Martelly showed a sympathy for him altogether paternal. A widower for some years, living with one of his sisters aged twenty-three, he regarded him as a son. The day after M. de Cazalis had set afloat the gossip, the ship-owner called Marius into his private office.

"Ah! my friend," said he, "this is a very sad affair. Your brother is lost. We are not powerful enough to save him from the terrible consequences of his folly."

M. Martelly belonged to the liberal party and was even distinguished in its ranks for a violence altogether southern. He had had differences with M. de Cazalis; he knew the man. His lofty probity and immense fortune placed him out of reach of an attack; but his liberalism was of a stately kind; he took a sort of pride in never using his power. He advised Marius to remain quiet and await events; he would second him with all his might when the struggle had commenced.

Marius, who was burning with excitement, was about resolving to ask leave-of-absence of his employer, when Fine, one morning, ran into his chamber, all in tears.

"Monsieur Philippe is arrested!" cried she, sobbing. "They found him, with the young lady, in a country-house in the Trois-bons-Dieux district, a league from Aix."

And as Marius, full of trouble, hastily rushed away to obtain confirmation of the news, which was true, Fine, still bathed in tears, smiled sadly and said, in a low voice:

"At least, the young lady is no longer with him!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR.

BLANCHE and Philippe quitted the house of the gardener Ayasse at twilight, towards half-past seven o'clock. During the day they had seen gendarmes upon the highway; they were told that they would be arrested in the evening, and fear drove them from their first retreat. Philippe put on a peasant's blouse. Blanche borrowed the costume of a girl of the people from the gardener's wife: a dress of figured red calico and a pink apron; she covered her bosom with a yellow check fichu, and placed over her cap a large coarse straw hat. The gardener's son Victor, a lad of fifteen, accompanied them to guide them across the fields to the Aix highway.

The evening was warmish, with an occasional chill. Warm and biting exhalations arose from the ground and rendered languid the fresh breeze which came at times from the Mediterranean. In the west still lingered the glow as of a conflagration; the rest of the sky, of a sombre blue, was paling little by little, and the stars came out one by one in the darkness, like the trembling lights of a distant town.

The fugitives walked rapidly, with lowered heads,

without exchanging a word. They were in haste to reach the desert of the hills. While they were traversing the outskirts of Marseilles, they met rare passers whom they glanced at with mistrust. Then the broad country spread out before them, and they saw only, here and there, at the sides of the paths, grave and motionless shepherds in the midst of their flocks.

And, in the gloom, in the soft silence of the serene night, they continued to flee. Vague sighs floated about them; stones rolled beneath their feet with sharp sounds. The slumbering country quivered and extended, all black, in the lugubrious monotony of the darkness. Blanche, vaguely terrified, clung to Philippe, quickening her pace that she might not be left behind; she uttered heavy sighs, as she recalled the peaceful nights of her girlhood.

Then came the hills and deep gorges to be crossed. Around Marseilles, the roads are level and pleasant; but, further inland, one encounters those piles of rocks which cut the entire centre of Provence into narrow and sterile valleys. Uncultivated heaths and stony hills, sown with thin clusters of thyme and lavender, now stretched before the fugitives in their sad desolation. The paths ascended and descended along the hills; fragments of rock encumbered the roads; beneath the bluish serenity of the sky, the scene resembled a sea of flint, an ocean of stone, stricken with eternal immobility in the midst of a hurricane.

Victor, on the lead, softly whistled a Provençal air, as he leaped over the rocks with the agility of a

chamois; he had grown from infancy in this desert and knew every corner of it. Blanche and Philippe followed him toilsomely; the young man half carried his companion, whose feet were bruised by the sharp stones of the road. She did not complain, and, when Philippe looked interrogatively into her face in the transparent gloom, she smiled upon him with a sad gentleness.

They had just passed Septèmes, when the worn out young girl fell to the ground. The moon, which was slowly ascending the heavens, displayed her pale visage, bathed in tears. Philippe bent over her with anguish.

"You are weeping," cried he; "you are suffering, my poor, beloved child. Ah! I am a wretch, am I not, to keep you thus with me?"

"Do not say that, Philippe," responded Blanche. "I weep because I am an unhappy girl. See, I can scarcely walk. We would have done better to kneel before my uncle and pray to him with clasped hands."

She made an effort and arose, and they continued their walk through that terrible region. It was not the wild and gay escapade of a couple of lovers: it was a sombre flight, full of anxiety and suffering, the flight of two trembling and silent culprits.

They traversed the territory of Gardanne, and stumbled for nearly five hours over the obstacles of the path. They finally decided to descend to the Aix highway, and there they advanced with less difficulty, but the dust blinded them.

When they were at the top of the rising ground of the Arc, they dismissed Victor. Blanche had travelled six leagues on foot, among the rocks, in less than six hours; she seated herself upon a stone bench at the gate of the town, and declared that she could go no further. Philippe, who was afraid of being arrested if he remained at Aix, went in quest of a carriage; he found a woman seated in a cart, who consented to take Blanche and himself and conduct them to Lambesc, where she was going.

Blanche, despite the jolts, was soon in a deep slumber and did not awake until they reached the gate of Lambesc. This sleep calmed her blood; she felt rested and stronger. The two lovers quitted the vehicle. The dawn came, a fresh and radiant dawn which filled them with hope. All the phantoms of the night were gone; the fugitives had forgotten the rocks of Septèmes, and walked side by side in the wet grass, intoxicated with their youth and their love.

Not having found M. de Girousse, of whom Philippe had resolved to ask hospitality, they went to the inn, and at last enjoyed a day of peace and quietude. The inn-keeper, thinking that his guests were brother and sister, proposed to prepare two apartments. Blanche smiled; she had now the courage inspired by tenderness.

"One room will do," said she. "Monsieur is my husband."

The following day Philippe went to M. de Girousse, who had returned. He told him everything and asked his advice.

"The deuce!" cried the old noble, "your case is grave. You know that you are a clown; a century ago, M. de Cazalis would have had you hanged for having dared to touch his niece; to-day, he can only have you cast into prison. Rest assured that he will not fail to do it."

"What must I do?"

"What must you do? Send back the young girl to her uncle and gain the frontier as soon as possible."

"You are well aware that I will never do that."

"Then, quietly await your arrest. I have no other counsel to give you."

M. de Girousse had a friendly bluntness which hid the best heart in the world. As Philippe, confused by the roughness of his reception, was about to depart, he recalled him, and, taking his hand:

"My duty," resumed he, with a slight bitterness, "is to have you arrested. I belong to the nobility you have outraged. Listen: I have, on the other side of Lambesc, a small, unoccupied house, the key of which I will give you. Go conceal yourselves there, but say nothing to me about it; otherwise, I shall send the gendarmes after you."

The lovers remained over a week at Lambesc. They lived there in retirement, in the enjoyment of peace which was at times broken by sudden fears. Philippe had received the thousand francs from Marius. Blanche became a little housekeeper, and the twain ate with delight from the same plate.

This new existence seemed like a dream to the

young girl. Occasionally she grew dissatisfied, and longed to return to her uncle's home; but she was afraid to speak of this; she felt that she was weak and alone; she had accepted the flight and lacked the courage to retrace her steps.

It was the octave of the Fête-Dieu. One afternoon, as Blanche stood at the window, she saw a procession pass. She knelt and clasped her hands. The young maidens, clad in white, sang in joyous tones, bearing in their midst the banner of the Virgin. At this sight the poor child began to sob; she imagined herself in a snowy robe, among the singers, and her heart bled when she realized that she was a fugitive.

That evening, Philippe received an anonymous note. It warned him that he would be arrested on the following day. He thought he recognized M. de Girousse's handwriting. Then the flight was renewed; it was harder to bear and more wretched than before.

CHAPTER VI.

HUNTED DOWN.

IT was a bewildering confusion, a flight without intermission or repose, an incessant terror. Driven right and left by their fright, constantly thinking they heard behind them the gallop of horses, passing the nights running about the highways and the days trembling in the filthy chambers of inns, the fugitives traversed Provence many times, hurrying forward and retracing their steps, not knowing where to find an unknown retreat, hidden in the midst of some desert.

They quitted Lambesc on a terribly windy night and went towards Avignon. They had hired a little cart; the blast blinded the horse, and Blanche shivered in her miserable calico dress. As the climax of misfortune, they thought they saw in the distance, at one of the gates of the town, some gendarmes who were scanning the faces of the passers. Terrified, they turned about and went back to Lambesc, through which they merely passed.

They reached Aix, but were afraid to remain there; they resolved to gain the frontier, cost what it might. There they would procure a passport and find safety. Philippe, who was acquainted with a druggist at

Toulon, decided that they would go by way of that city; he hoped that his friend would facilitate their flight.

The druggist, a burly, jovial fellow named Jourdan, gave them a hearty welcome. He concealed them in his own chamber, and said he would at once endeavor to get them a passport.

Jourdan had barely left the house when two gendarmes presented themselves.

Blanche nearly fainted; pale, seated in a corner, she restrained her sobs. Philippe, in a choking voice, asked the gendarmes what they wanted.

"Are you the Sieur Jourdan?" demanded one of them, with ill-omened harshness.

"No," answered the young man. "M. Jourdan has gone out, but he will soon return."

"Very good," said the gendarme, coldly.

And he sat down, heavily. The poor fugitives were afraid to look at each other; they were full of terror; they felt unspeakable uneasiness in the presence of these men who had, without doubt, come to seek them. Their torture lasted half an hour. At length Jourdan returned; he grew pale on seeing the gendarmes and answered their questions with inexpressible confusion.

"You must come with us," said one of the men to him.

"Why?" asked Jourdan. "What have I done?"

"You are accused of having cheated at cards, last evening, at a club. You will have to explain matters to the Juge d' Instruction."

A shiver of terror shook Jourdan. His face looked like that of a corpse. He seemed utterly overwhelmed, and, with the docility of a child, followed the gendarmes, who withdrew without even noticing the fright of Blanche and Philippe.

The Jourdan case, at that time, caused a great sensation in Toulon; but no one knew of the private and poignant scene which had taken place at the druggist's house on the day of his arrest.

This scene discouraged Philippe. He realized that he was too weak to escape from that human justice which was tracking him. Besides, he now no longer hoped to procure a passport and could not cross the frontier. Further, it was plain to him that Blanche had begun to be weary. He resolved, therefore, to approach Marseilles and wait, in the vicinity of that city, until M. de Cazalis' anger had somewhat abated. Like all those in utter despair, he entertained at certain moments ridiculous hopes of pardon and happiness.

Philippe had at Aix a relative named Isnard, who kept a mercer's shop. The fugitives, no longer knowing at what door to knock, returned to Aix to ask Isnard for the key of one of his country-houses. Misfortune pursued them: they did not find the mercer at home, and were obliged to hide in an old dwelling on the Cours Sextius, with a cousin of M. de Girousse's farmer. This woman hesitated to receive them, fearing lest, later, her hospitality should be considered a crime; she yielded only when Philippe swore to have her son

exempted from military service. The young man was, doubtless, in one of his hopeful hours; he already saw himself the nephew of a deputy and made full use of his uncle's power.

In the evening Isnard visited the lovers, and gave them the key of a country-house he possessed on the plain of Puyricard. He owned two besides this: one at Tholonet and the other in the Trois-bons-Dieux district. The keys of these were hidden under certain huge stones which he described to them. He advised them not to sleep two nights in succession beneath the same roof, and promised them that he would make every effort to keep the track of the police.

The lovers departed and took the road which passes beside the Hôpital.

Isnard's country-house was situated to the right of Puyricard, between the village and the Venelles highway. It was one of those hideous little huts built of lime and stones heaped upon each other and adorned with red tiles; there was but a single apartment in it, a sort of filthy stable; remnants of straw were scattered about the floor and huge spider-webs hung from the ceiling.

Philippe and Blanche fortunately had a blanket. They collected the remnants of straw in a corner and spread the blanket over the heap. They passed the night amid the biting exhalations of dampness.

On the morrow they spent the day in the bed of the dried-up torrent of Touloubre. Then, towards evening, they took the Venelles highway, made a circuit to

avoid passing through Aix, and reached Tholonet. At eleven o'clock they arrived at the country-house which the mercer possessed below the Oratoire des Jésuites.

This hut was more comfortable than the other. It had two apartments, a kitchen and a dining-room; in the latter was a bed of spun-yarn; the walls were covered with caricatures cut from the Charivari, and strings of onions were suspended from the white-washed beams. The two lovers thought themselves in a palace.

When they awoke in the morning, fear again seized upon them; they climbed the hill and remained until night in the gorges of the Infernets. At that period the precipices of Jaumegarde yet preserved all their sinister horror; the Zola canal had not pierced the mountain, and the fugitives did not venture into that gloomy tunnel of reddish rocks. Blanche and Philippe tasted profound peace in the midst of this desert; they reposed for a long while beside a spring which gushed, limpid and gurgling, from a gigantic block of stone.

With the night returned the cruel necessity of finding a shelter. Blanche could scarcely walk; her wounded feet bled on the pointed and sharp flints. Philippe knew that he could not take her far. He supported her, and slowly they ascended to the plateau which overlooks the Infernets. There stretched out uncultivated plains, vast fields of stones and vague territory hollowed out here and there by abandoned quarries. There is nothing so strangely sinister as that broad landscape with horizons of mournful ampli-

tude, spotted now and again with low and dark verdure; the rocks, like broken limbs, pierce the barren soil; the plain, humped together, seems to have been stricken with death amid the convulsions of frightful agony.

Philippe hoped to discover a den, a cavern. He had the good fortune to come across a station, one of those little huts in which hunters conceal themselves to wait for the birds of passage. He broke open the door of the cabin without the least scruple, and seated Blanche on a small bench which he felt beneath his hand. Then he went to pull up a large quantity of thyme; the plateau was covered with that humble gray plant, the biting odor of which clings to all the hills of Provence.

Philippe heaped the thyme in the station and made of it thus a sort of straw bed, spreading the blanket upon it.

And the two lovers, upon that miserable couch, gave each other the evening kiss. Ah! what meek suffering and bitter delight that kiss contained!

Philippe's love had become madness. Incessantly obliged to flee, menaced in his dreams of wealth, beneath the blow of an implacable chastisement, the young man rebelled and calmed his rebellion by pressing Blanche in his arms as if he would crush her. The young girl was for him a vengeance; he possessed her as an irate master; he bent her beneath his kisses.

His pride increased. His ambition was largely gratified. A son of the people, he at last controlled the

destiny of a daughter of those powerful and haughty men whose equipages had sometimes hurled mud into his face, and he recalled the legends of the country, the vexations of the nobles, the martyrdom of the people, all the cowardice of his fathers before the cruel caprices of the nobility. Then he took vengeance: he stifled Blanche with his caresses.

He had grown to feel a bitter joy in dragging her over the stones of the road. He did not avow these wretched thoughts; he hid from himself the cruelty of his conduct. The truth was that his beloved's anguish and fatigue rendered her dearer and more desirable to him. He would have loved her less in a salon, in the midst of peace. In the evening, when, broken by weariness, she fell beside him, he contemplated her with a cruel joy; the child's sufferings were another spur which augmented his strange love.

The lovers had passed the night amid the filth of the Puyricard country-house. They were there, upon the straw, among the spider-webs, separated from the world. Around them fell the grand silence of the slumbering heavens. They could love each other in peace; they no longer trembled; they were alone. Philippe would not have exchanged the squalid hut for a royal palace; he said to himself, with transports of pride, that a descendant of the Cazalis family was married to him and was with him in a stable.

And on the morrow and the following days, what keen enjoyment to drag Blanche after him through the deserts of Jaumegarde! He bore away his beloved

with all the gentleness of a father and the violence of a wild beast.

He could not sleep in the station: the strong odor of the thyme, upon which he lay, drove him mad. He dreamed, wide awake, that M. de Cazalis had received him with tenderness and that he had been named deputy as the successor of his uncle. At times he heard the dolorous sighs of Blanche, who was dozing at his side, feverish and agitated.

The young girl had come to consider her flight with Philippe as a nightmare, full of dolorous terrors. She remained, during the day, stupefied by fatigue; she smiled sadly, but never complained. Her inexperience had made her accept the departure, and her weak character prevented her from demanding that they should return. She belonged body and soul to this man, who was carrying her in his arms; she would have preferred not to walk so much, but she had no idea of quitting Philippe; she continued innocently to believe that her uncle would sanction their marriage, and that it was only necessary to run about among the rocks for a few days longer. She was a big baby, who had had the misfortune to be a woman before the proper age.

At sunrise the fugitives quitted their retreat. Their garments began to be terribly torn, and poor Blanche's shoes had holes in them. In the coolness of the morning, amid the sharp perfumes of the plateau which the new-born sunbeams flooded with yellow and pink light, the lovers forgot for an hour their misery and

their abandonment. They laughingly declared that they were ferociously hungry.

Then Philippe made Blanche enter the station, and hastened to Tholonet for provisions. He was gone half an hour. When he returned, he found the young girl frightened; she asserted that she had seen wolves pass.

A broad stone slab served as the breakfast table. Blanche and Philippe looked like a couple of Gypsy lovers breakfasting in the open air. After breakfast, the twain walked to the middle of the plateau where they remained all day. They passed there, perhaps, the happiest hours of their love-life.

But, when twilight came on, they were afraid; they did not wish to spend another night in that solitude. The warmish and pure air of the hill had given them hopes and milder thoughts.

"Are you weary, my child?" asked Philippe of Blanche.

"Oh! yes," answered the young girl.

"Listen: we will make a last journey. Let us go to the country-house which Isnard owns in the Trois-bons-Dieux district, and remain there until your uncle pardons us or causes my arrest."

"My uncle will pardon us."

"I dare not believe you. At any rate, I desire to flee no longer; you have need of rest. Come; we will walk slowly."

They crossed the plateau, going away from the Infernets, leaving to the right the Château de Saint-

Marc, which they saw upon the height. In an hour they reached their destination.

Isnard's country-house was on the hill which stretches to the left of the Vauvenargues highway, when one has passed the Vallon de Repentance. It was a little, two-story cabin; on the first floor there was but one apartment, in which stood a rickety table and three seatless chairs. A wooden ladder led to the chamber above, a sort of garret entirely bare, where the lovers found as the only furniture a wretched mattress placed upon a pile of hay. Isnard had charitably put a white sheet at the foot of the mattress.

Philippe's intention was to go to Aix on the morrow, and obtain information as to M. de Cazalis' designs in regard to himself. He knew that he could not conceal himself much longer; he retired almost in peace, calmed by the soothing words of Blanche, who judged events with a young girl's hopefulness.

For twenty days the fugitives had been running about the fields. For twenty days the gendarmes had been scouring the country, following in their tracks, sometimes taking the wrong road but always brought back to the scent by some trifling circumstance. M. de Cazalis' anger had increased at all these delays; his pride was irritated by each fresh obstacle. At Lambesc the gendarmes had presented themselves a few hours too late; at Toulon the passage of the fugitives had been signaled only the day after their return to Aix; everywhere, Philippe and Blanche escaped as by a miracle. At last, the deputy accused the police of bad faith.

Finally, he was assured that the lovers were in the neighborhood of Aix and were about to be arrested. He hurried to Aix; he wished to assist in the search.

The woman of the Cours Sextius, who had harbored Blanche and Philippe for a few hours, had been stricken with terror; that she might not be accused of complicity, she told all; she said that the young folks must be concealed in one of Isnard's country-houses.

On being questioned, Isnard calmly denied everything. He declared that he had not seen his relative for several months. This took place at the very time Philippe and Blanche were entering the country-house of the Trois-bons-Dieux district. The mercer could not warn the lovers during the night. At five o'clock the next morning, a commissaire de police knocked at his door and informed him that a search was about to be made at his house and at his three properties.

M. de Cazalis remained at Aix, declaring that he feared he might kill Philippe if he met him face to face. The agents who were directed to visit the Puyricard country-house found the nest empty. Isnard obligingly offered to conduct two gendarmes to his Tholonet property, suspecting that it would be a useless errand. The commissaire de police, accompanied also by two gendarmes, started for the Trois-bons-Dieux district; he took a locksmith with him, Isnard having stated vaguely that the key of the house was hidden under a stone to the right of the door.

It was about six o'clock when the commissaire reached the country-house. All the openings were closed; no sound came from the interior. The commissaire advanced and cried, in a loud voice, pounding upon the door with his fist:

"In the name of the law, open!"

Echo alone answered. Nothing stirred. After several minutes, the commissaire turned to the locksmith and said:

"Pick the lock."

The locksmith went to work. The scraping of the iron broke the silence. Then the shutter of a window opened violently, and, amid the golden brightness of the rising sun, his neck and arms bare, appeared Philippe Cayol, disdainful and angry.

"What do you want?" said he, leaning his elbows heavily on the window sill.

At the first blow dealt upon the door by the commissaire, Philippe and Blanche suddenly awoke. Seated on the mattress, amid the tremors of awakening, they heard with anxiety the sound of voices.

The cry, "In the name of the law!" that terrible cry which bursts upon the ears of the guilty like a clap of thunder, nearly deprived the young man of breath. He started up, trembling, dismayed, not knowing what to do. The young girl, her eyes yet heavy with sleep, wrapped herself in the sheet and wept with shame and despair.

Philippe comprehended that all was over, and that he could do nothing but surrender. A sullen revolt

stirred in him. So his dreams of wealth were dead: he never would be acknowledged as Blanche's husband; he had carried off an heiress to be cast into prison; at the dénouement, instead of the lordly dwelling of which he had dreamed, he would find a dungeon. Then a cowardly thought came to him: he entertained the idea of leaving his beloved there and fleeing in the direction of Vauvenargues to the gorges of Sainte-Victoire; perhaps he might escape through a window at the back of the country-house. He leaned towards Blanche, and, hesitatingly, told her his plan in a low voice. The young girl, who was choking with sobs, did not understand him, did not hear him. He saw with anguish that, mentally, she was not in a condition to cover his flight.

At that moment, he heard the sharp sound of the hooks which the locksmith had inserted in the lock. The secret and poignant drama, which was in progress in that bare chamber, had lasted at most two or three minutes.

Philippe felt himself lost, and his irritated pride restored his courage. If he had been armed, he would have defended himself. Then he said to himself that he was not an abductor, that Blanche had chosen to follow and marry him, and that, after all, the shame in the matter was not for him. At this he angrily pushed open the shutter, demanding what was wanted.

"Open the door for us," commanded the commissaire. "We will tell you afterwards what we want."

Philippe came down the wooden ladder and opened the door.

"Are you the Sieur Philippe Cayol?" asked the commissaire.

"Yes," answered the young man, firmly.

"Then I arrest you as guilty of abduction. You have carried off a young girl under sixteen years of age, who should be hidden with you."

Philippe smiled disdainfully.

"The former Mademoiselle Blanche de Cazalis, who is now my wife, is up-stairs," said he. "She can declare if there has been violence on my part. I know not what you mean in talking of abduction. I shall, this very day, throw myself at the feet of M. de Cazalis and ask his sanction of his niece's marriage with me."

Blanche, pale and trembling, descended the ladder. She had hastily dressed herself.

"Mademoiselle," said the commissaire to her, "I have orders to take you to your uncle, who is waiting for you at Aix. He is in tears."

"I am very sorry that I displeased my uncle," replied Blanche, with a certain firmness; "but no one must accuse M. Cayol, whom I followed and married of my own free will."

And, turning towards the young man, moved, ready to sob anew:

"Hope, Philippe," continued she; "I love you and will supplicate my uncle to be good to us. Our separation will last only a few days."

Philippe looked at her with a sorrowful air, shaking his head.

"You are a timid and weak child," said he, slowly.

Then he added, in a harsh tone:

"Remember only that you are my wife, that you belong to me through the flesh and through the heart. If you desert me, every hour of your life the remembrance of me will torment you; you will always feel on your lips the fiery stamp of my kisses, and that shall be your punishment."

Blanche wept.

"Love me as I love you," resumed the young man, in a milder voice.

The commissaire put Blanche into a carriage, which he had sent for, and conducted her to Aix, while the two gendarmes took Philippe and led him to the prison of that town.

CHAPTER VII.

BLANCHE TURNS AGAINST PHILIPPE.

THE news of the arrest did not reach Marseilles until the following day. It caused a tremendous sensation. In the afternoon, M. de Cazalis was seen to pass with his niece over the Cannebière. Gossip ran wild; everybody talked of the deputy's triumphant attitude, of Blanche's embarrassment and blushes. M. de Cazalis was the man to exhibit the young girl throughout all Marseilles, in order to let the people know that she was again under his control.

Marius, notified in the morning by Fine, had hurried about the city for hours. The public voice confirmed the news; he was able to seize on the wing all the details of the arrest. The fact, in a brief space, had become legendary, and the shop-keepers and corner idlers related it as if it had been a marvellous story of a century before. The young man, weary of hearing these idle tales, went to his office, his head aching, not knowing upon what to decide.

Unfortunately, M. Martelly was absent and would not return until the following evening. Marius felt the necessity of acting sooner; he wished at once to take some step which would reassure him in regard to

his brother's fate. His fears consequent upon the reception of the news had, however, somewhat subsided; he had reflected that, after all, his brother could not be accused of abduction, and that Blanche would be on hand to defend him at any moment. He innocently arrived at the belief that he ought to visit M. de Cazalis to demand of him, in his brother's name, his sanction to Philippe's marriage with his niece.

The next morning, he dressed himself in a complete suit of black and was descending the stairs, when Fine presented herself according to her custom. The poor girl grew deadly pale when Marius informed her of the object of his errand.

"Will you let me accompany you?" asked she, in a supplicating tone. "I will await in the street the answer of the young lady's uncle."

She followed Marius. On reaching the Cours Bonaparte, the young man entered the deputy's house with a firm step and caused himself to be announced.

M. de Cazalis' blind rage had abated. He held his vengeance. He was about to demonstrate the greatness of his power by crushing one of those liberals whom he detested. He now desired only to taste the cruel joy of playing with his prey. He ordered M. Marius Cayol to be admitted. He expected tears and ardent supplications.

The young man found him in the centre of a large salon, standing, with a haughty and implacable air. He advanced towards him, and, without giving him time to speak, said, in a calm and polite tone:

"Monsieur, I have the honor to ask you, in the name of my brother, M. Philippe Cayol, for your sanction to the marriage between him and Mademoiselle Blanche de Cazalis, your niece."

The deputy was literally thunderstruck. He could not get angry, so grotesquely extravagant did Marius' demand seem to him. Drawing back, staring the young man in the face and laughing disdainfully, he answered:

"You are mad, Monsieur. I am aware that you are a hard-working and honest fellow, and that is the reason I do not order my servants to put you out of the house. Your brother is a scoundrel, a knave who will be punished according to his deserts. What do you want of me?"

Marius, on hearing his brother insulted, felt a ferocious desire to fall like a clown upon the noble personage and beat him with his fists. He restrained himself and continued, in a voice which began to tremble with emotion:

"I have told you what I want, Monsieur. I came here to offer Mademoiselle de Cazalis the only reparation possible—a legal marriage sanctioned by you. Thus the wrong that has been done her will be obliterated."

"We are above wrong!" cried the deputy, contemptuously. "There is no shame for Blanche de Cazalis in having been beloved by a fellow like Philippe Cayol, but there would be shame for her in allying herself with such people as you. I will never sanction that marriage, which, without my consent is null and void!"

"Such people as we are have other ideas in regard to honor. But I do not insist; duty alone dictated to me the offer of reparation which you refuse. Permit me only to add that your niece would, without doubt, urge upon you a different course, if I had the honor of addressing myself to her."

"Do you think so?" said M. de Cazalis, in a jeering tone.

He rang and ordered his niece to be brought thither immediately. Blanche entered, pale, her eyes red. She looked as if broken by too strong emotions. On perceiving Marius, she trembled.

"Mademoiselle," said her uncle, coldly, "here is a gentleman who formally asks for your hand in the name of the infamous wretch whom I forbear to mention otherwise in your presence. Tell the gentleman what you told me yesterday."

Blanche wavered. She dared not look at Marius. With eyes fixed upon her uncle, all in a tremble, she murmured, in a hesitating and feeble voice:

"I told you that I was abducted by violence, and forced into a marriage, and that I would use every effort to obtain punishment for the odious wrong of which I was the victim."

These words were recited like a lesson learned. Following the example of Saint Peter, Blanche denied her Lord.

M. de Cazalis had not lost his time. The moment his niece was in his power, he brought to bear upon her all his prejudice and all his pride. He realized

that she alone could make him win the game. It was imperative that the young girl should lie, that she should stifle the revolts and the cries of her heart, that she should be a yielding and passive instrument in his hands.

For four hours he poured cold and sharp words into her ears. He did not commit the imprudence of showing anger. He spoke with crushing haughtiness, reminding her of the antiquity of her race, talking of his power and his fortune. He displayed exquisite cunning, sketching on one side the picture of a ridiculous and vulgar mésalliance, showing on the other side the noble joys of a rich and great marriage. He attacked the young girl through her coquetry, her vanity, her appetite for luxury and her self-love; he fatigued her, broke her, stupefied her, rendered her what he wished her to be—supple and inert.

After this long interview, this long martyrdom, Blanche was conquered. Perhaps, under her uncle's overwhelming words, her patrician blood at last revolted at the remembrance of Philippe's brutal caresses; perhaps, her childish vanity was aroused at the mention of luxurious toilets, honors of all kinds and worldly delights. Besides, her head was too weak, her heart too cowardly, to resist the deputy's terrible will. Each phrase uttered by M. de Cazalis had struck her, crushed her, filled her with dolorous anxiety. She had loved, followed and married Philippe through weakness; now she had turned against him also through weakness; she was still the same timid and inexperi-

enced soul. She had accepted everything. She had promised everything. She had been eager to escape from the suffocating weight which her uncle's discourse had heaped upon her.

When Marius heard her make her strange declaration, he stood stupefied, filled with terror. He recalled the young girl's attitude at the house of the gardener Ayasse; he saw her hanging about Philippe's neck, faint, trusting and loving.

"Ah! Mademoiselle," cried he, bitterly, "the odious wrong of which you were the victim appeared to exasperate you less the day you begged me with clasped hands to implore your uncle's pardon and consent. Have you reflected that your falsehood will cause the ruin of the man whom, perhaps, you still love and who is your husband in the sight of God?"

Blanche, rigid, her lips pressed together, stared vaguely before her.

"I know not what you mean," answered she, hesitatingly. "I have told no falsehood. I yielded to force. That man deceived and wronged me, and my uncle will avenge the honor of our family."

Marius straightened up. Generous anger added to his short stature and his thin face grew beautiful with justice and truth. He glanced around him, and, with a gesture of contempt, said, in a measured tone:

"And I am in the Cazalis mansion, I am in the home of the descendants of that illustrious family which Provence delights to honor. I knew not that falsehood

dwelt within these walls, and did not expect to find calumny and cowardice sheltered here. Oh! you shall hear me to the end. I wish to cast my lackey's dignity into the unworthy faces of my masters!"

Then, turning to the deputy and pointing towards Blanche, who was quivering like a leaf, he resumed:

"That child is innocent; I pardon her weakness. But you, Monsieur, you are a crafty man; you protect maidens by making them liars and cowards; you are, indeed, a noble son of your fathers. If now you were to offer me for my brother your sanction to this marriage with Mademoiselle Blanche de Cazalis, I would refuse it, for I have never lied, I have never committed an evil action, and I should blush to ally myself with such people as you!"

M. de Cazalis bent beneath the young man's fury. At the first insult, he had summoned a tall devil of a lackey, who was standing on the threshold of the door. As the deputy signed to him to throw Marius into the street, the latter continued, with a terrible burst of anger:

"I swear to you that I will cry murder if that man take a step. Let me pass. Some day, Monsieur, I may, perhaps, be able to hurl into your face before everybody the truths I have just spoken in this salon!"

And he departed, with a deliberate and firm step. He no longer saw Philippe's guilt; in his eyes his brother had become a victim whom he wished to save and avenge at any cost. In his upright soul, the smallest falsehood, the least injustice, brought on a

tempest. Already the gossip, which M. de Cazalis had set afloat at the time of the flight, had made him assume the defence of the fugitives; now that Blanche had lied and that the deputy was making use of the calumny, he longed to be powerful enough to take justice into his own hands and proclaim the truth in the open street.

He found Fine upon the sidewalk. Uneasiness was devouring her.

"Well?" asked the young girl, as soon as she saw him.

"Well!" answered Marius, "those people are miserable liars and proud idiots."

Fine took a long breath. A wave of blood mounted to her cheeks.

"Then," said she, "Monsieur Philippe's marriage with the young lady is not to be acknowledged?"

"The young lady," replied Marius, with a bitter smile, "claims that Philippe is a scoundrel who abducted her by violence and forced her to marry him! My brother is lost!"

Fine did not understand. She bowed her head, asking herself how the young lady could call her lover a scoundrel. And she thought that she would have been delighted to have been married to Philippe, even through violence. Marius' rage enchanted her: the project for legalizing the marriage had failed.

"Your brother is lost, you say," murmured she, with tender cajolery. "Oh! I will save him—we will save him together!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POWERLESS BROTHER.

WHEN, in the evening, Marius related to M. Martelly the interview he had had with M. de Cazalis, the ship-owner said to him, shaking his hand:

"I know not what advice to give you, my friend. I do not wish to fill you with despair; but rest assured that you will be vanquished. It is your duty to engage in the struggle, and I will second you as best I may. Let us admit, however, between ourselves, that we are weak and disarmed in face of an adversary who has on his side the clergy and the nobility. Marseilles and Aix love not the monarchy of July, and these two cities are entirely devoted to a deputy of the opposition who makes terrible war on M. Thiers. They will aid M. de Cazalis in his vengeance; I speak of the leaders; the people will help us, if they can help any one. Our best plan would be to win to our cause an influential member of the clergy. Do you not know some priest in favor with the bishop?"

Marius answered that he knew the Abbé Chastanier, a poor old fellow who was entirely powerless.

"No matter; see him," said the ship-owner. "The citizens cannot help us; the nobility would thrust us ignominiously into the street, if we asked favors of

them. The church remains. It is there we must knock. Take the matter in hand; I will work on my side."

Marius, the next day, went to Saint-Victor. The Abbé Chastanier received him with a sort of terrified embarrassment.

"Do not ask anything of me!" cried he, at the young man's first words. "It is known that I have already meddled with that affair, and I have received grave reproaches. As I have told you, I am only a poor man; I can do nothing but pray God."

The humble attitude of the old priest touched Marius. He was about to depart when the abbé retained him and said, in a low tone:

"Listen: there is a man here, the Abbé Donadéi, who could be useful to you. It is said that he stands on the best footing with Monseigneur. He is a foreign priest, an Italian, I believe, who, in a few months, has won everybody's love."

The Abbé Chastanier paused, hesitating, seeming to interrogate himself. The worthy man thought that he was about to compromise himself terribly, but could not resist the sweet joy of rendering a service.

"Do you wish me to accompany you to his house?" asked he, suddenly.

Marius, who had noticed his brief hesitation, strove to refuse; but the old man was resolved; he no longer heeded his personal peace: he wished to content his heart.

"Come," resumed he. "The Abbé Donadéi lives but a short distance from here, on the Boulevard de la Corderie."

After a few minutes' walk, the Abbé Chastanier stopped in front of a small, two-story house, one of those close and discreet houses which have a vague air of mystery.

"This is the place," said he to Marius.

An aged serving-woman answered their summons and introduced them into a little study with sombre hangings, which resembled an austere boudoir.

The Abbé Donadéi received them with supple ease. His pale face, full of cunning and indicative of trickery, did not betray the least astonishment. He offered chairs with a cajoling gesture, half bent, half smiling, doing the honors of his study as a woman would do the honors of her toilet-chamber.

He wore a long black robe, loose at the waist. He had a coquettish look in that plain costume; his white and delicate hands emerged as small as a woman's from broad sleeves, and his shaven visage maintained a tender freshness amid the chestnut curls of his hair. He appeared to be about thirty.

He seated himself in an arm-chair and listened, with smiling gravity, to what Marius had to say. He made him repeat the details of the flight of Philippe and Blanche; the narrative seemed to interest him infinitely.

The Abbé Donadéi was born at Rome. He had an uncle a cardinal. One fine day, that uncle sent him hurriedly to France, without people ever discovering exactly why. On his arrival, the handsome abbé was compelled to enter the little seminary of Aix as

professor of living languages. A situation so low down in the scale humiliated him to such a point that he fell ill.

The cardinal was moved and recommended his nephew to the Bishop of Marseilles. Then satisfied ambition cured Donadéi. He entered Saint-Victor, and, as the Abbé Chastanier innocently remarked, had won everybody's love in a few months. His caressing Italian nature and his mild, rosy face made him the delight of the demure lady devotees of the parish. He triumphed particularly when in the pulpit: his slight accent gave a strange charm to his sermons, and, when he opened his arms, he imparted to his hands quivers of emotion which melted the congregation to tears.

Like almost all Italians, he was born for intrigue. He used and abused his uncle's recommendation to the Bishop of Marseilles. Soon he was a power, a hidden power which toils beneath the surface and opens pits for the steps of those it wishes to rid itself of. He became a member of a religious society, all-powerful in Marseilles, and, by his suppleness in smiling and bowing, imposed his will upon his colleagues and made himself the head of a party. Then, he mixed himself up with every event, glided into all affairs; he it was who had caused M. de Cazalis to be named deputy, and he was awaiting a suitable opportunity to demand of him payment for his services. His plan was to work for the success of the rich; later, when he had merited their gratitude, he counted upon

making them work in their turn to advance his own fortune.

He questioned Marius with complacency; he seemed from his attention, from the kindness of his reception, to be altogether disposed to aid him in his work of deliverance. The young man allowed himself to be trapped by the amiable mildness of his manners; he opened his soul to him, told him his projects and admitted that the clergy alone could save his brother. Finally, he asked him to use his influence with Monseigneur. Then the Abbé Donadéi arose and, in a tone of austere pleasantry, said:

"Monsieur, my sacred character prohibits me from interfering in this deplorable and scandalous affair. The enemies of the church too often accuse the priests of going out of their sacristies. I can only ask God to pardon your brother."

Marius, in consternation, had also arisen. He realized that he had been tricked by Donadéi. He strove to keep an unmoved countenance.

"I thank you," answered he. "Prayers are very sweet alms for the unfortunate. Ask God that men may do us justice."

He went towards the door, followed by the Abbé Chastanier, who walked with bowed head. Donadéi had affected not to see the old priest.

Upon the threshold, the handsome abbé, recovering all his graceful levity, retained Marius an instant.

"You are employed by M. Martelly, I believe," said he.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the young man, in astonishment.

"He is a man of high honor, but I know he is not one of our friends. Nevertheless, I cherish the most profound esteem for him. His sister, Mademoiselle Claire, whom I have the honor of directing, is one of our best parishioners."

And as Marius stared at him, finding nothing to say in reply, Donadéi added, coloring slightly:

"She is a charming person, and of exemplary piety."

He bowed with exquisite politeness and gently closed the door. The Abbé Chastanier and Marius, standing alone upon the sidewalk, glanced at each other, and the young man could not avoid shrugging his shoulders. The old priest was confused to see a minister of God play comedy thus. He turned towards his companion and said, hesitatingly:

"My friend, we must not blame God if his ministers are not always what they should be. The young man from whom we have just parted is guilty only of ambition."

He went on thus, excusing Donadéi. Marius looked at him, touched by his goodness, and, despite himself, he compared this poor and modest old man with the powerful and graceful abbé, whose smiles were the law of the diocese. Then he thought that the church loved not her sons with an equal love and that, like all mothers, she spoiled the rosy faces and tricky hearts, and neglected the tender and humble souls who devoted themselves in the shade.

The two visitors were departing, when a carriage stopped before the close and discreet little house. Marius saw M. de Cazalis descend from this carriage; the deputy hastily entered the Abbé Donadéi's dwelling.

"Look, father," cried the young man; "I am certain that the sacred character of that priest will not prohibit him from working to secure the vengeance of M. de Cazalis."

He was tempted to return to that house, in which God was made to play so miserable a rôle. But he calmed himself; he thanked the Abbé Chastanier and went his way, saying mentally with despair that the last door of safety, that of which the high clergy held the key, had been shut in his face.

The next day, M. Martelly informed him of an attempt he had made with the leading notary of Marseilles, M. Douglas, a pious man, who, in less than eight years, had become a veritable power through his rich clientèle and his liberal alms. The name of this notary was loved and respected. People spoke with admiration of the virtues of this upright toiler, who lived frugally; they had unbounded confidence in his honesty and in the activity of his intelligence.

M. Martelly had availed himself of his assistance to invest certain funds. He hoped that, if Douglas would lend his support to Marius, the latter would have a portion of the clergy on his side. He went to the house of the notary and asked his aid. Douglas, who

seemed greatly preoccupied, stammered out an evasive answer, saying that he was overburdened with business and that he could not struggle against M. de Cazalis.

"I did not insist," said M. Martelly to Marius; "I imagined that your adversary had been before you. I am astonished, however, that M. Douglas, a man of probity, should allow his hands to be tied. Now, my poor friend, I am sure that the game is entirely up."

Marius had no longer the smallest hope. For a month he scoured Marseilles, striving to win to his cause a few influential men. Everywhere he was received coldly, with satirical politeness. M. Martelly was equally unsuccessful. The deputy had rallied all the nobility and the high clergy around him. The citizens, the commercial people, laughed in their sleeves, without taking any action, having an atrocious fear of compromising themselves. As to the masses, they lampooned M. de Cazalis and his niece, not being able otherwise to serve Philippe Cayol.

Time sped on; the preparations for the criminal trial were progressing rapidly. As on the first day, Marius stood alone to defend his brother against M. de Cazalis' hatred and Blanche's complaisant lies. He had constantly beside him M. Martelly, who declared himself powerless, and Fine, whose fiery talk had gained for Philippe the ardent sympathy of the girls of the people.

One morning, Marius learned that his brother and the gardener Ayasse had been indicted, the first as guilty of abduction and the second as accomplice in

the crime. Madame Cayol had been released, the proofs against her not being sufficient to hold her for trial.

Marius hastened to embrace his mother. The poor woman had suffered greatly during her imprisonment; her wavering health was greatly impaired. A few days after her discharge from prison, she gently expired in the arms of her son, who swore amid his sobs to avenge her death.

The funeral occasioned a popular manifestation. Philippe's mother was taken to the Cimetière Saint-Charles, followed by an immense cortège of women of the people, who accused M. de Cazalis, in loud tones, of being the cause of her death. But little was wanting to induce these women to rush to the deputy's house and hurl stones at the windows.

On returning from the burial, Marius, in his little apartment on the Rue Sainte, felt himself alone in the world and wept bitterly. His tears solaced him; he saw the road he must take, clearly traced before his eyes. The evils which overwhelmed him augmented in him the love of truth and the hatred of injustice. He felt that all the rest of his life must be devoted to a holy work.

There was nothing now for him to do in Marseilles. The scene of the drama had changed. The action was to occur at Aix, according to the variations of the trial. Marius wished to be on the spot to follow the different phases of the case and profit by the incidents which might present themselves. He asked M.

Martelly for a month's leave-of-absence, which the ship-owner at once granted him.

On the day of his departure, he found Fine in the diligence.

"I am going to Aix with you," said the young girl to him, calmly.

"But this is madness!" cried he. "You are not rich enough to devote yourself thus. And your flowers, who will sell them?"

"Oh! I have put in my place one of my friends, a girl who lives upon the same landing with me on the Place aux Œufs. I said to myself: 'I can be of use to them;' so I put on my handsomest dress and here I am!"

"I thank you with all my soul!" said Marius, simply, in a shaking voice.

CHAPTER IX.

M. DE GIROUSSE GOSSIPS.

AT Aix, Marius went to the house of Isnard, who dwelt on the Rue d'Italie. The mercer had not been disturbed. A prey of such slight value was, doubtless, disdained.

Fine went straight to the dwelling of the jailer of the prison. She was his niece by marriage. She had her plan. She took with her a huge bouquet of roses which was received with delight. Her pretty smiles and her caressing vivacity made her in two hours her uncle's spoiled child; the jailer was a widower and had two infant daughters of whom Fine immediately became the little mother.

The trial was not to begin until the commencement of the following week. Marius, his hands tied, no longer daring to take a single step, awaited with anguish the opening of the proceedings. At times he was still mad enough to hope for, to count on, an acquittal.

One evening, while walking upon the Cours, he met M. de Girousse, who had come from Lambesc to be present at Philippe's trial. The old gentleman took his arm, and, without uttering a word, led him to his hôtel.

"Now," said he, shutting himself up with him in a large salon, "we are alone, my friend. I can be a plebeian at my ease."

Marius smiled at the rough and peculiar behavior of the comte.

"Well," continued the latter, "you do not ask me to serve you, to defend you against de Cazalis! You are intelligent. You understand that I can do nothing against the obstinate and vain nobility to whom I belong. Ah! your brother sought for lofty game!"

M. de Girousse strode about the salon. Suddenly he planted himself before Marius.

"Listen to our history," said he, in an excited voice: "There are, in this good town, fifty old fellows like myself, who live apart, cloistered in the depths of a past forever dead. We call ourselves the flower of Provence, and here we are, inactive, twirling our thumbs. But we are gentlemen, chivalrous hearts, awaiting with devotion the return of our legitimate princes. Ah! mordieu! we will wait a long while, such a long while that solitude and idleness will kill us before the least sign of a legitimate prince appears. If we had good eyes, we would see the march of events. We cry to the facts: 'You shall go no further!' and the facts calmly pass over our bodies and crush us. I am enraged to see us shut up in an infatuation as ridiculous as heroic. To think that we are almost all rich, that we could almost all become intelligent artisans who could toil for the prosperity of the country, and that we prefer to mould in the recesses of our hôtels like old wrecks of another age!"

He took breath, and then continued, with greater energy:

"And we are all proud of our empty existence. We do not work out of disdain for toil. We have a holy horror of people whose hands are grimy. Ah! your brother has touched one of our daughters! He will be made to see if he is of the same blood as we are. We will unite together and give a lesson to the clowns; we will take from them the desire to be beloved by our children. Some powerful ecclesiastics will second us: they are fatally bound to our cause. This will be a fine campaign for our vanity."

After an instant's silence, M. de Girousse resumed, jeeringly:

"Our vanity! It has sometimes met with huge impediments. A few years before my birth, a terrible drama was enacted in the hôtel which adjoins mine. M. d' Entrecasteaux, the President of Parliament, assassinated his wife there in her bed; he cut her throat with a razor, urged on, they say, by a passion which he wished to gratify even by the aid of crime. The razor was not found until twenty-five days afterwards, at the extremity of the garden; they found also in the well the victim's jewels, which the murderer had thrown there to make justice believe that the motive of the assassination had been robbery. President d' Entrecasteaux fled and retired, I believe, to Portugal, where he died miserably. The Parliament condemned him for non-appearance to be broken alive upon the wheel. You see that we also have our

scoundrels and that the people have no reason to envy us. This cowardly cruelty on the part of one of our number struck, at the time, a heavy blow at our authority. A novelist might make a stirring romance of that bloody and lugubrious history.

"And we also know how to cringe," said M. de Girousse, who had resumed walking. "For example, when Fouché, the regicide, then Duc d'Otrante, was, about 1810, temporarily exiled to our city, all the nobles threw themselves at his feet. I recall an anecdote which shows to what base servility we descended: On the first of January, 1811, a line was formed to offer the former member of the Convention the wish of a happy new year; in the reception salon, they were talking of the extreme cold then prevailing, and one of the visitors expressed fears as to the fate of the olive trees. 'Ah! what do we care about olive trees,' cried one of the noble personages, 'provided that M. the Duc enjoys good health!' See how we are to-day, my friend: humble with the powerful and haughty with the weak. There are, without doubt, exceptions, but they are rare. You can readily understand that your brother will be convicted. Our pride, which bends before a Fouché, cannot bend before a Cayol. That's logical. Good-evening."

And the comte hastily dismissed Marius. He had grown exasperated while speaking, and was afraid that anger might make him talk foolishness.

The next day, the young man met him again. M. de Girousse, as on the previous evening, led him

into his hôtel. He held in his hand a journal containing the names of the jurors who were to try Philippe.

He struck the journal forcibly with his finger.

"Here are the men," cried he, "who are to be entrusted with your brother's fate. Shall I give you a few histories in regard to them? Those histories are curious and instructive."

M. de Girousse had seated himself. He ran his eye over the journal, shrugging his shoulders.

"It is," said he, at last, "a select jury, an assemblage of rich people whose interest it is to serve the cause of M. de Cazalis. They are all more or less church-wardens, more or less frequenters of the salons of the nobility. Nearly all of them have for friends men who pass their mornings in the churches and squeeze money wrongfully out of their customers the rest of the day."

Then he named the jurors one by one, and spoke of the society in which they moved with indignant vehemence.

"Humbert," said he,—"the brother of a merchant of Marseilles, of an oil dealer, an honest man held in high consideration, whom all the poor devils salute. Twenty years ago, their father was only an humble clerk. To-day, the sons are millionaires, thanks to his shrewd speculations. One year, he sold in advance, at the current price, an enormous quantity of oil. A few weeks afterwards, the cold killed the olive trees and the crop was lost; he was ruined if he did not deceive his customers. But our man preferred decep-

tion to poverty. While his brethren in the trade delivered sound merchandise at a loss, he bought all the spoiled oil, all the rancid oil, he could find, and made his promised deliveries. His customers complained and grew angry. The speculator coolly replied that he had strictly kept his promises, and that they could demand nothing further of him. The trick was played. All Marseilles knows this history and has not enough bows for this adroit man.

"Gautier—another merchant of Marseilles. He has a nephew, Paul Bertrand, who tricked on a vast scale. This Bertrand was in partnership with a Sieur Aubert, of New York, who sent him cargoes of merchandise to be sold at Marseilles. They were to divide the profits. Our man made a great deal of money at this business, the more because he took care to cheat his partner in each division. One day, a crisis was reached and losses came. Bertrand continued to accept the merchandise which the ships still brought, but refused to pay the drafts Aubert drew upon him, saying that business had proved unfortunate with him and that he was embarrassed. The drafts went back, and returned again with enormous costs added. Then Bertrand calmly declared that he would not pay them, that he was not obliged eternally to remain Aubert's partner and that he owed him nothing. Another sending back of the drafts; new costs, heavy reimbursements for the surprised and indignant New York merchant. The latter, who could sue only by power of attorney, lost the action for damages and interest which he

brought against Bertrand; I have been assured that two-thirds of his fortune, twelve hundred thousand francs, were swallowed up in this catastrophe. Bertrand remains the most honest man in the world; he is a member of all the societies and several congregations; he is envied and honored.

"Dutailly—a grain merchant. There happened in the past to one of his sons-in-law, Georges Fouque, a misadventure, the scandal of which his friends hastened to stifle. Fouque always so managed it as to cause the cargoes, which the ships brought him, to be found damaged. The insurance companies paid, upon the report of an expert. Weary of paying constantly, these companies entrusted the duty of reporting to an honest baker, who speedily received a visit from Fouque. The latter, while chatting about unimportant matters, slipped some gold pieces into his hand. The baker let the pieces fall and, with a kick, sent them into the middle of the apartment. The scene took place in the presence of a number of persons. Fouque has lost nothing of his credit.

"Delorme—a man who lives in a town near Marseilles. He retired from business long ago. Listen to the details of an infamous action committed by his cousin Mille. Thirty years since, Mille's mother kept a mercer's shop. When the old lady retired, she transferred her stock to one of her clerks, an active and intelligent fellow, whom she regarded almost as a son. The young man, whose name was Michel, soon paid his debt and so increased his trade that he was

obliged to take a partner. He chose a Marseilles youth, Jean Martin, who had some money and who seemed to be honorable and industrious. It was a certain fortune which Michel offered his partner. At first, everything went for the best. The profits were augmented yearly, and the two associates each put aside a round sum at the close of every twelvemonth. But Jean Martin, greedy of gain and dreaming of a rapid fortune, said to himself at last that he would make twice as much if he were alone. The matter was difficult to accomplish; Michel, in short, was his benefactor, and the owner of the house, Mme. Mille's son, was his friend. Should the latter prove to be an honest man, Jean Martin would fail in his shameful project. He called on him, counting upon finding a man of his own stamp, and, in fact, he found in him the scoundrel he sought. Martin asked for a new lease in his own name, offering a large sum of money, and, as Mille haggled, he doubled, then tripled the amount. Mille, who is a pedant and a miser, sold himself for the highest possible price; the bargain was concluded. Then, Jean Martin played with Michel the rôle of a hypocrite; he told him that he wished to dissolve their partnership agreement that he might establish himself further away; he even pointed out to him the shop he had hired. Michel, astonished, but not suspecting the infamous proceeding of which he was to be the victim, informed him that he was at liberty to withdraw, and the agreement was annulled. A short time afterwards, Michel's lease expired, and Jean Martin, his new lease

in his hand, triumphantly showed his former partner the door. Such crimes escape human justice, but the cowardly and greedy wretches who commit them are condemned by the tribunal of men of honor. I cannot sufficiently express my contempt for this Mille, who, from infancy had been the friend, the brother, so to speak, of Michel, whom he betrayed in a manner so venal and so base. There are plenty of such foul consciences as his, which bear the weight of an infamous deed lightly. Since we cannot drag into the Cour d'Assises these cunning criminals who cast their friends upon the sidewalk for a bag of hundred-sou pieces, we should post their names in huge letters at the street corners and each passer should spit upon them. That is the ignoble pillory they deserve. Michel, driven almost wild by this treason, established himself in another locality; but, having no longer any customers, he lost the money he had laboriously amassed by thirty years of toil. He died of paralysis amid atrocious suffering, crying out that Mille and Martin were wretches and traitors, and calling upon his sons for vengeance. To-day, his sons are working, are sweating blood and water, to win a position. Mille is allied to the first families of the city; his children are rich; they live luxuriously, surrounded by the devotion and esteem of all.

"Faivre —. His mother took for her second husband a Sieur Chabran, a ship-owner and note shaver. Under pretext of unfortunate speculations, Chabran wrote one day to his numerous creditors that he was

forced to suspend payment. Some consented to give him time. The majority wished to prosecute him. Then Chabran hired two young lads, into whose ears for a week he poured a certain lesson; then, flanked by these two little beings, perfectly drilled, he visited, one after another, all his creditors, bewailing his trouble and demanding pity for his two sons, ragged and without bread. The trick succeeded marvellously. All his creditors tore up their notes. The following day, Chabran was at the Bourse, calmer and more insolent than ever. A broker, who was ignorant of what had taken place, proposed to him to discount two notes, signed by some of the very merchants who, the day before, had given quittance to this wretch. 'I will have nothing to do with people of that class,' he answered, boldly. Now, Chabran has almost given up business; he lives in a splendid hôtel, where he gives sumptuous dinners on Sundays.

"Gerominot—the President of a club at which he passes his evenings, and a usurer of the worst kind. He has made, they say, a million francs at that business, which has enabled him to marry his daughter to a shining light of finance. His name is Pertigny, but, since the failure which left in his hands a capital of three hundred thousand francs, he has called himself Félix. This adroit scoundrel made, forty years ago, his first failure, which put him in condition to buy a house. His creditors received fifteen per cent. Ten years later, a second failure permitted him to acquire a superb country mansion. His creditors received ten

per cent. Scarcely fifteen years ago, he made a third failure for three hundred thousand francs and offered five per cent. The creditors having refused to accept it, he proved to them that all his property belonged to his wife, and did not give them a centime."

Marius was discouraged; he made a gesture of disgust, as if to interrupt these ignominious revelations.

"You do not believe me, perhaps," resumed the terrible comte, with a certain haughtiness. "You are a young innocent, my friend. I have not finished; I wish you to hear me to the end."

M. de Girousse jeered with a sinister heat. His words, loud and hissing, fell like the crack of a whip upon those whose foul histories he recited. One recognized the disdainful gentleman from the freedom of his speech and the generous impetuosity of his fury.

He named the jurors turn by turn; he scanned their lives and those of their families; he exposed all the shame and wretchedness in them. Very few, indeed, did he spare. Then he violently placed himself before Marius and continued, with asperity:

"Did you have the innocence to believe that all those millionaires, all those parvenus, all those powerful people, who domineer over and crush you, were little saints and just men whose lives were without stain? Those men make a display, at Marseilles, of their vanity and their insolence; they have become devotees and hypocrites; they have deceived even the honest folks who salute and esteem them. In a word,

they form an aristocracy of their own; their past is forgotten; one sees but their wealth and probity of recent date. Well, I will tear off the masks. Listen: This one has made a fortune by betraying a friend; another by selling human flesh; another by selling his wife or his daughter; another by speculating on the misfortunes of his creditors; another by redeeming at a low figure, after having himself adroitly discredited it, all the stock of a company of which he was the superintendent; another by sinking a ship loaded with stones instead of merchandise, and making the insurance company pay him the price of this strange cargo; another, a partner by verbal agreement, by refusing to share the hazard of an operation as soon as that operation became bad; another by hiding his assets, making two or three failures and living afterwards like a man of means; another by selling for wine extract of logwood or beef's blood; another by forestalling grain on the ocean during the years of scarcity; another by defrauding the revenue on a large scale, by striving to corrupt the employés and by stealing his fill from the administration; another by placing on notes forged signatures of relatives or friends, who were afraid to deny them on the day of maturity, and paid rather than compromise the forger; another by himself burning his factory or his ships, insured beyond their value; another by tearing up and throwing into the fire the notes he snatched from his creditor's hands on the day of payment; another by gambling at the Bourse with the intention of not

paying if he lost, and, in fact, by refusing to pay, which did not prevent him from enriching himself, a week afterwards, at the expense of some dupe."

M. de Girousse's breath failed him. He maintained a long silence, allowing his anger to cool. Then his lips again opened and his smile was less bitter:

"I am somewhat of a misanthrope," said he, mildly, to Marius, who had listened to him with pain and surprise; "I see everything in sombre colors. The reason is that the idleness to which my title condemns me has permitted me to study the pollutions of this district. But know that there are some honest people among us; if they would rise in a body, they could easily crush the scoundrels. I pray God every night that this civil war of virtue against vice may break out at an early day. As for you, count only upon the equity of the magistracy; you will find in it a firm support, independent and loyal. Its members do not crawl like slaves at the bidding of the rich and powerful. I have always had for the magistracy a fanatical respect, for it is the representative of truth and justice on earth."

Marius took leave of M. de Girousse, altogether overwhelmed by the fiery words he had heard. He foresaw that his brother would be pitilessly convicted. The commencement of the proceedings was set down for the following day.

CHAPTER X.

PHILIPPE'S TRIAL.

ALL Aix was excited. Gossip bursts out with strange energy in those quiet little towns, where the curiosity of the idlers has not each day a new aliment. Nothing was talked of but Philippe and Blanche; the adventures of the young lovers were related in the open street; it was loudly asserted that the accused was convicted in advance, and that M. de Cazalis had, either personally or through his friends, demanded his conviction of each juror.

The clergy of Aix lent its support to the deputy, feebly enough, it is true; that clergy then contained eminent and honorable men to whom promoting an injustice was repugnant. A few priests, nevertheless, yielded to the influence coming from the religious society of Marseilles, of which the Abbé Donadéi was, so to speak, the master. These priests strove by visits and shrewd proceedings to bind the hands of the magistracy, the upright and firm spirit of which was feared. They succeeded only in persuading the jurors that the cause of M. de Cazalis was holy.

The nobility strongly aided them in this task. They believed themselves in honor bound to crush Philippe Cayol. They regarded him as a personal enemy, who

had dared to make a criminal attempt against the dignity of one of their number, and who had thus insulted them in a body. To see the comtes and marquises agitate themselves, get angry and unite together, one would have thought that the foemen were at the gates of the town. The matter in hand was simply to cause the conviction of a poor devil, guilty of love and ambition.

Philippe also had friends and defenders. All the people declared frankly for him. The lower classes blamed his conduct, censured the means he had employed, and said that he would have done better to have loved and wedded the daughter of some plain citizen like himself; but, while condemning his actions, they noisily defended him against the pride and hatred of M. de Cazalis. It was known in the town that Blanche, before the Juge d'Instruction, had denied her love, and the girls of the people, true Provençales, that is to say devoted and courageous, treated her with insulting contempt. They called her "the renegade;" they assigned infamous motives for her conduct, and did not hesitate to cry out their opinion in the public squares, in the energetic language of the streets.

This noise singularly compromised Philippe's cause. The entire town was in the secret of the drama which was about to be played. Those who were interested in having the accused convicted did not even take the trouble to conceal their proceedings, being certain of their triumph; those who wished to save Marius' brother, feeling themselves weak and disarmed, found

solace in shouting, happy to irritate the powerful people whom they had no hope of conquering.

M. de Cazalis had, without shame, dragged his niece to Aix. During the first days, he took a proud delight in exhibiting her upon the Cours. He protested thus against the idea of disgrace which the crowd attached to the young girl's flight; he seemed to say to all: "You see that a clown cannot harm a Cazalis. My niece still towers above you from the height of her title and her fortune!"

But he could not long continue such promenades. The crowd grew angry at his attitude; it insulted Blanche, and was on the point of hurling stones at the uncle and niece. The women especially showed exasperation; they did not comprehend that the young girl was not altogether to be blamed and that she was simply obeying an iron will.

Blanche trembled at the popular fury. She bowed her head that she might not see those women who glared at her with fiery eyes. She was conscious of gestures of contempt behind her; she heard horrible words which she did not understand, and her limbs quaked beneath her; she clung to her uncle's arm that she might not fall. Pale and quivering, she returned to her dwelling one day, declaring that she would go out no more.

The poor child was about to become a mother.

Finally, the proceedings began. From early in the morning, the doors of the Palais-de-Justice were besieged; groups formed in the midst of the Place

des Prêcheurs, gesticulating and talking in loud tones. People grew noisy over the probable issue of the trial; they discussed the culpability of Philippe and the attitude of M. de Cazalis and Blanche.

The court-room filled up slowly. Several rows of chairs had been added for persons provided with tickets; these persons were so numerous that nearly all of them were compelled to stand. In the crush were to be seen the flower of the nobility, lawyers, officials—in short, all the notable personages of Aix. Never had an accused drawn such an audience. When the doors were opened to allow the general public to enter, only a few curious persons were able to get in. The others were obliged to stand in the door-ways, in the lobbies and even upon the steps of the Palais. And every instant there arose from that crowd murmurs and shouts, the sound of which penetrated into the court-room and was augmented there, disturbing the tranquil majesty of the place.

The ladies had invaded the gallery. They formed up there a compact mass of anxious and smiling faces. Those who were on the first row fanned themselves, leaned over, allowing their gloved hands to rest upon the red velvet of the balustrade. Behind them, in the partial obscurity, mounted packed rows of rosy faces, the bodies belonging to which could not be seen. These rosy faces were as if buried in the midst of laces, ribbons, silks and satins; here and there sparkled the sudden flash of a jewel, when one of the heads was turned. And from that noisy and garrulous

crowd fell pearly laughter, soft words and sharp little cries. These ladies were at a play.

When Philippe Cayol was brought in, there was a sudden silence. All the ladies devoured him with their eyes; some of them pointed opera-glasses at him, examining him from head to foot. This tall fellow, whose energetic features announced violent appetites, had a quiet success. The women, who had come to judge of Blanche's taste, doubtless thought the young girl less guilty when they saw the lofty stature and bright looks of her lover.

Philippe's attitude was calm and appropriate. He was clad wholly in black. He seemed to ignore the presence of the two gendarmes who were beside him; he straightened himself and sat down with the grace of a man of the world. Occasionally he glanced at the crowd, tranquilly and without effrontery. He several times raised his eyes to the gallery, and, each time, smiled tenderly in spite of himself; his incorrigible habits of loving and wishing to please resumed possession of him, even in the face of justice.

The bill of indictment was read.

This document was very severe on the accused. In it the facts, according to the depositions of M. de Cazalis and his niece, were stated in an able and terrible manner. It was asserted that the young girl had been abducted by violence, that she had clung to an almond tree, and that, during the entire flight, the abductor had been compelled to employ intimidation to cause his victim to follow him. Finally, a most serious matter

was brought forward on the affirmation of Mlle. de Cazalis: she claimed that she had never written to Philippe, and that the two letters presented by the accused were antedated letters which he had forced her to write at Lambesc as a precautionary measure.

When the reading of the bill of indictment was finished, the court-room was filled with a noisy murmur of conversation. Each person, before coming to the Palais, had a version of the affair, and the official recital was discussed in partially subdued voices. Outside, the crowd uttered veritable howls. The President threatened to order the court-room cleared, and silence was gradually re-established.

The questioning of Philippe Cayol was then proceeded with.

When the President had asked him the customary questions and had repeated to him the points of the accusation against him, the young man, without argument, said, in a clear voice:

"I am accused of having been abducted by a young girl!"

These words made the spectators smile. The ladies hid behind their fans to enjoy the joke at their ease. But Philippe's phrase, altogether foolish and absurd as it seemed, contained, nevertheless, the exact truth. The President remarked that the abduction of a man of thirty by a young girl of sixteen was something unheard of.

"Neither have you ever heard," replied Philippe, tranquilly, "of a young girl of sixteen passing along

the public highways, traversing towns, meeting hundreds of persons and not thinking of summoning the first passer to deliver her from her jailer!"

And he proceeded to show the utter impossibility of the violence and intimidation of which he was accused. At each hour of the day, Blanche had been free to quit him, to demand aid and relief; if she followed him, it was because she loved him, because she had consented to the flight and marriage. Besides, Philippe displayed the greatest tenderness for the young girl and the greatest deference for M. de Cazalis. He admitted his errors; he merely asked that they should not make him out a base abductor.

The court was adjourned until the following day, which was set apart for hearing the statements of the witnesses.

That evening, the town was in confusion; the ladies spoke of Philippe with affected indignation, the grave men treated him with more or less severity and the masses defended him with energy.

The next day, the crowd at the doors of the Palais-de-Justice was larger and noisier than before. The witnesses were nearly all witnesses for the prosecution. M. de Girousse had not been summoned; they feared the rude freedom of his wit, and, besides, he should rather have been arrested as an accomplice. Marius himself had begged him not to compromise himself in the case. He, like his adversaries, feared the violent spirit of the old comte, who by a whim might spoil everything.

There was but one deposition in favor of Philippe, that of the Lambesc inn-keeper, who declared that Blanche gave her companion the title of husband. This deposition was effaced, so to speak, by those of the other witnesses. Marguerite, the milkmaid, stammered and said that she could not recall having carried Mlle. de Cazalis' letters to the accused. Thus all the witnesses but one served the deputy's interests, either through fear or stupidity and lack of memory.

The speeches began and necessitated another session. Philippe's lawyer defended him with appropriate simplicity. He did not seek to excuse that which was culpable in his client's conduct; he represented him as an ardent and ambitious man, who had allowed himself to be led astray by hopes of wealth and love. But, at the same time, he maintained that the accused could not be convicted of abduction, and that the affair in itself excluded all idea of violence and intimidation.

The speech of the Procureur du Roi was terrible. The defence had counted upon a certain mildness, and the official's energetic accusations produced a disastrous effect. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty. Philippe was sentenced to an imprisonment of five years and to be publicly exposed in one of the squares of Marseilles. The gardener Ayasse was sent to prison for a few months only.

A confused tumult arose in the court-room. Without, the crowd muttered.

CHAPTER XI.

BLANCHE AND FINE FACE TO FACE.

BLANCHE, hidden in the depths of the gallery, heard Philippe sentenced. She was there by order of her uncle, who wished to crush out whatever tenderness might be lingering in her by showing her her lover between two gendarmes like a thief. An aged female relative had been instructed to take her to this edifying spectacle.

As the two ladies were waiting for their carriage on the steps of the Palais, the crowd, precipitating itself from the building, suddenly separated them. Blanche, dragged into the middle of the Place des Prêcheurs, was recognized by the huckster women, who began to shout at and insult her.

"It is she, it is she!" cried these women. "The renegade, the renegade!"

The poor child, dismayed, not knowing where to flee, was dying with shame and fear, when a young girl with a powerful push scattered the howling group which surrounded her and planted herself at her side.

It was Fine.

The flower-girl also had witnessed the conviction of Philippe. For nearly three hours, she had endured all the agonies of hope and fear; the speech of the

Procureur du Roi had overwhelmed her, and she had wept frantically on hearing the sentence pronounced.

She was leaving the Palais, irritated and terribly excited, when she heard the shouts of the huckster women. She comprehended that Blanche was there and that she could take vengeance by abusing her; she ran towards the spot, her fists clenched, with insults on her lips. In her eyes, the young girl was the greatest culprit: she had lied; she had perjured herself and committed a cowardly act. At these thoughts, all Fine's plebeian blood mounted to her face and urged her to cry out and strike.

She precipitated herself upon the crowd; she scattered it to seize upon her prey.

But when she stood before Blanche, when she saw her bent with terror, the quivering and feeble child filled her with pity. She found her so young, so pretty and so delicately fragile that a generous thought of pardon took possession of her heart. With a violent gesture she drove back the women who were shaking their fists at the trembling girl, and, straightening herself up, cried, in a loud, sharp voice:

"Are you not ashamed of yourselves? She is alone, and you are a hundred against her! God has no need of your howls to punish her! Let us pass!"

She had taken Blanche's hand and, in her rage, firmly faced the crowd which murmured and came closer together to bar the passage of the two young girls. Fine waited, her lips pale and trembling. And, as she reassured her companion with a glance, she saw

that she was about to become a mother. She grew white as a sheet, and, striding towards the women in the first row, said, in a louder tone:

"Let us pass, I say! Do you not see the poor girl's condition, wretches, and that you will kill her child!"

She repulsed a gross huckster who was sneering. All the other women drew back. Fine's words had suddenly rendered them silent and compassionate. The young girls retired between two hedges of women, among whom ran vague murmurs of regret. Blanche, red with shame, clung with fear to her companion and feverishly hastened her steps.

The flower-girl, to avoid the Rue du Pont-Moreau, then full of people and noise, took the little Rue Saint-Jean. On reaching the Cours, she led Mlle. de Cazalis to her hôtel, the door of which was open. During the walk, she had not uttered a word.

Blanche forced her to enter the vestibule, and there, partially closing the door and almost going upon her knees, she said, in a voice full of emotion:

"Oh! Mademoiselle, I thank you with all my soul for having come to my rescue! Those wicked women would have murdered me!"

"Do not thank me," answered Fine, roughly. "I came like the rest to insult you, to beat you!"

"You!"

"Yes. I hate you; I wish you had died in your cradle!"

Blanche stared at the flower-girl with astonishment. She drew herself up; her aristocratic instincts rebelled

and her lips grew slightly pale with disdain. The two young girls stood face to face, the one with all her frail grace, the other in her fresh and energetic beauty. They contemplated each other silently, feeling surge in them the rivalry of their classes and hearts.

"You are beautiful, you are rich," resumed Fine, bitterly; "why did you steal my lover from me, when you knew that in the end you must despise and hate him? You should have sought in your own sphere; you should have found a stripling as pale and as cowardly as yourself, who would have satisfied your little girl's love. See here: if you aristocrats take our men, we will tear your pink and white faces for you!"

"I do not understand you," stammered Blanche, again seized by fear.

"You do not understand me! Listen, then: I loved Monsieur Philippe. He bought roses of me every morning, and my heart beat as if it would burst when I gave him my bouquets. I know now where those flowers went. I was told one day that he had fled with you. I wept; then I thought you loved him and that he would be happy. But you have put him in prison. Let us not speak of that, or I shall get angry and strike you!"

She paused, panting; then she continued, going close up to the girl, burning with her hot breath Blanche's icy cheeks:

"You do not know how we poor girls love. We love with all our flesh, with all our courage. When we elope with a man, we do not say afterwards that

he took advantage of our weakness. We clasp him tightly in our arms to protect him. Ah! if Monsieur Philippe had loved me, he would not have been betrayed! But I am an unhappy creature, a beggar, an ugly wretch!"

And Fine began to sob, as weak as Mlle. de Cazalis. The latter took her hand, and said, her voice broken by tears:

"In pity, do not accuse me! Will you be my friend —shall I open my heart to you? If you only knew how much I suffer, you would have mercy. I can do nothing; I obey my uncle, who breaks me in his hands of iron. I know I am a coward; but I have not the strength to be otherwise than cowardly. And I love Philippe; he is always in my mind. Truly did he say to me: 'If you desert me, every hour of your life the remembrance of me will torment you, you will always feel on your lips the fiery stamp of my kisses, and that shall be your punishment!' He is here now; he burns me, he will kill me! Awhile ago, when he was sentenced, I felt something leap within me which shook me from head to foot and almost tore me to pieces. I am weeping—do you see? I ask mercy of you."

All Fine's anger had vanished; she sustained Blanche, who was staggering.

"You are right," continued the poor child: "I do not deserve pity. I have stricken the man I love and he will love me no more. Ah! in mercy, if some day he should become your husband, tell him of my tears,

ask him to forgive me. What drives me wild is that I can never convince him that I adore him; he would laugh; he could not comprehend the extent of my cowardice. No; do not speak to him of me. Let him forget me—that will be best: I shall be the only one to weep."

There was a dolorous silence.

"And your child?" asked Fine.

"My child!" said Blanche, wildly. "I do not know what will become of it. My uncle will take it from me."

"Would you like me to be a mother to it?"

The flower-girl uttered these words in a grave and tender voice. Mlle. de Cazalis clasped her in her arms in a passionate embrace.

"Oh! how good you are! You can love! Try to see me in Marseilles. When the time comes, I will trust in you."

At that moment, the aged female relative made her appearance, after having in vain searched for Blanche in the crowd. Fine withdrew quickly and hastened up the Cours. As she reached the Place des Carmélites, she saw Marius in the distance, talking with Philippe's lawyer.

The young man was in despair. Never had he imagined that his brother could be sentenced to so severe a punishment. The imprisonment of five years terrified him; but he was still more grievously overwhelmed by the thought of the public exposure in one of the squares of Marseilles. He saw the deputy's

hand in this chastisement: M. de Cazalis wished, above all else, to disgrace Philippe, to render him forever unworthy of a woman's love.

Around Marius, the crowd cried out that injustice had been done; the masses with one voice protested against the atrocity of the punishment.

And as the young man, angry and hopeless, talked excitedly with the lawyer, a soft hand was placed upon his arm. He turned quickly and saw Fine beside him, calm and smiling.

"Hope and follow me," said she to him, in a low voice. "Your brother is saved!"

CHAPTER XII.

FINE'S STRATEGY.

WHILE Marius, before the trial, was fruitlessly scouring the town, Fine, on her side, was toiling away at the work of deliverance. She had undertaken a systematic campaign against the conscience of her uncle, the jailer Revertégat.

She had installed herself at his house; she spent the days in the prison. She sought from morning till night to make herself useful, to cause herself to be adored by her relative, who lived alone, like a growling bear, with his two little daughters. She attacked him through his paternal love; she charmingly cajoled the children; she expended all her savings for playthings, sugar-plums and toilet gewgaws. The little ones were not in the habit of being indulged; they acquired a noisy tenderness for their big cousin, who danced them on her knees and distributed such handsome and good things. The father was touched; he thanked Fine effusively.

Despite himself, he yielded to the penetrating influence of the young girl. He grumbled when it was necessary for him to leave the room in which she was. The flower-girl seemed to have brought with her the sweet odor of her flowers, the freshness of her roses

and violets. The jailer's lodge had been delightfully perfumed from the moment of her arrival, when she tripped into it, gay and sprightly; her bright skirts appeared to scatter there light, air and gayety. Everything smiled now in the gloomy apartment, and Revertégat said, with a hearty laugh, that spring had come to live with him. The good man forgot himself amid the caressing effluvia of that spring; his heart softened and, little by little, he laid aside the roughness and severity incident to his vocation.

Fine was too shrewd a girl not to play her rôle with sly prudence. She did nothing hastily; step by step, she led him to pity and lenity. Then, she expressed compassion for Philippe in his presence; she forced him to declare with his own lips that the young man was unjustly kept in prison. When she held Revertégat in her hands, supple and submissive, she asked him if she could not visit the cell of the poor fellow. The jailer dare not say no; he took his niece to the spot, allowed her to enter and remained at the door to keep watch.

Fine stood like a simpleton before Philippe. She stared at him, confused and blushing, oblivious of what she wished to say. The young man recognized her and quickly approached her, with a tender and charmed air.

"You here, my dear child!" cried he. "Ah! how kind you are to come to see me. Will you allow me to kiss your hand?"

Surely, Philippe thought himself in his little apart-

ment on the Rue Sainte, and, perhaps, he was not far from dreaming of a new adventure. The flower-girl, surprised, almost wounded, withdrew her hand and gravely looked at Blanche's lover.

"You are out of your senses, Monsieur Philippe," answered she. "You know well enough that, in my eyes, you are now married. Let us speak of serious things."

She lowered her voice and continued, rapidly:

"The jailer is my uncle, and, for over a week, I have been working for your deliverance. I wished to see you to tell you that your friends have not forgotten you. Hope!"

Philippe, on hearing these welcome words, regretted his gallant reception of his visitor.

"Give me your hand," said he, in an agitated voice. "I ask it as a friend, who wishes to grasp it like an old comrade. Do you pardon me?"

The flower-girl smiled, without answering his question.

"I think," resumed she, "that I can soon throw the door wide open for you. When will you make your escape?"

"Make my escape! But I shall be acquitted. What is the use of flight! If I escaped, I should declare by that very action that I am guilty!"

Fine had not thought of that. In her view, Philippe was convicted in advance; but, all things considered, he was right: they should wait until after the trial. As she maintained silence, pensive and

irresolute, Revertégat gave two little knocks upon the door to ask her to quit the cell.

"Well," continued she, addressing the prisoner, "hold yourself in readiness. If you are convicted, your brother and I will arrange your flight. Have confidence."

She withdrew, leaving Philippe almost in love with her. Now she had time before her in which to win over her uncle. She continued to pursue her strategy, amazing the dear man by her kindness and her grace, exciting his pity in regard to the prisoner's lot. She brought into the conspiracy her two little cousins, who, at a word from her, would have quitted their father to follow her. One evening, after having softened Revertégat by all the cajoleries she could invent, she at last asked him squarely for Philippe's freedom.

"Pardieu!" cried the jailer, "if the matter rested only with me, I would at once open the door for him!"

"But it does rest only with you, uncle!" answered Fine, frankly.

"Ah! you think so, do you? If I allowed him to escape, I should lose my place to-morrow and die of hunger with my two daughters."

These words rendered the flower-girl serious.

"But," resumed she, an instant afterwards, "what if I gave you money, if I loved this young man and if I begged you with clasped hands to give him up to me?"

"You! you!" cried the jailer, in astonishment.

He had arisen; he stared at his niece to make sure that she was in earnest. When he saw her grave and moved, he bowed his head, conquered, softened, consenting with a gesture.

"Ma foi!" said he, "in that case, I would do as you wished. You are too good and too pretty a girl to be refused!"

Fine embraced him and spoke of something else. Now, she was certain of victory. At various times, she resumed the conversation; she accustomed Revertégat to the idea of allowing Philippe to escape. She did not wish to bring her relative to want, and, at first, offered him a recompense of fifteen thousand francs. This offer dazzled the jailer; from that instant, he surrendered himself to her, bound hand and foot.

And this was why Fine had been able to say to Marius, with her cunning smile: "Follow me. Your brother is saved!"

She took the young man to the prison. On the way, she related to him all the details of her campaign; she told him how, little by little, she had won over her uncle. Marius' upright soul at first revolted at the recital of this comedy; it was repugnant to him to think that his brother would owe his safety to flight, to the purchase of a conscience. The idea of duty was so deeply rooted in him that he felt a certain shame at the proposal to pay Revertégat to betray the trust that had been reposed in him. Then he thought of the intrigues employed by M. de Cazalis; he said to himself that, after all, he would only be using the same weapons as his adversaries, and he grew calm.

He thanked Fine in a touching way; he knew not how to show her his gratitude. The young girl, happy in her excited joy, scarcely heard his protestations of indebtedness.

They could not see Revertégat until evening. The jailer, at the first words of the conversation, showed Marius his two little daughters, who were playing in a corner of the room.

"Monsieur," he simply said, "there is my excuse. I would not ask for a sou, if I had not those children to keep."

This scene was painful to Marius. He shortened it as much as possible. He knew that the jailer yielded at once to interest and devotedness, and, if he could not despise him, he felt ill at ease in making such a bargain with him.

However, all was settled in a few minutes. Marius stated that he would depart the following morning for Marseilles, and that he would bring back with him the fifteen thousand francs promised by Fine. He counted upon drawing them from his banker; his mother had left fifty thousand francs, which were deposited with M. Bérard, whose house was one of the strongest and best known in the city. It was decided that the flower-girl should remain at Aix, and there await the young man's return.

He departed, full of hope, already seeing his brother free. As he quitted the diligence at Marseilles, he received unexpected and terrible news which crushed him. The banker Bérard had just failed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SCOUNDRELLY BANKRUPT.

MARIUS hastened to the banker's office. He could not believe the sinister news, for he had the faith of honest hearts. On the way, he said to himself that the rumors which were in circulation were, perhaps, only calumnies, and he cherished wild hopes. The loss of his fortune at this moment was the loss of his brother; it seemed to him that chance could not be so cruel to him; the public must be deceived; Bérard would pay him his money. He must see with his own eyes to be convinced.

When he entered the banking-house, cold anguish seized upon his heart. He saw the terrible reality. The rooms were vacant; the vast apartments, deserted and still, with their closed gratings and their bare desks, appeared funereal to him. A fortune which crumbles away leaves a sad desolation behind it. A vague odor of ruin escaped from the pasteboard boxes, from the papers and from the safe. Seals spread everywhere their white bands and their huge bits of red wax.

Marius passed through three rooms without finding any one. He at last discovered a clerk, who had come to take from a desk some articles belonging to him.

This clerk told him in a rough tone that M. Bérard was in his office.

The young man entered, trembling, forgetting to close the door. He perceived the banker, who was tranquilly at work writing letters, arranging papers and adjusting accounts. This man, still young, tall, with a handsome and intelligent face, was dressed with exquisite taste; he wore rings on his fingers; he had a polite and rich air. He looked as if freshly arrayed to receive his customers and personally explain to them his disaster.

Besides, his attitude seemed courageous. He was a resigned victim of circumstances, or, rather, an arrant scoundrel who would get out of a scrape by dint of audacity.

On seeing Marius enter, he assumed an air of compunction; he looked his customer squarely in the face, and his countenance expressed a sort of honest sorrow.

"I expected you, my dear Monsieur," said he, in an agitated voice. "You see that I am waiting for all those whose ruin I have caused. I will have courage to the end; I wish every one to see that I have nothing to be ashamed of."

He placed a ledger on his desk and opened it with a certain affectation.

"Here are my accounts," continued he. "My obligations foot up a million and my assets a million, five hundred thousand francs. The court will arrange matters, and I hope my creditors will not suffer too heavy a loss. I am the first to feel the blow: I have

lost my fortune and my credit; I have allowed myself to be outrageously robbed by insolvent debtors."

Marius had not yet uttered a word. In the presence of Bérard's dejected calmness, in the presence of this mise-en-scène of austere grief, he could not find in his heart a single cry of reproach, a single indignant and furious syllable. He almost pitied this man who thus faced the storm.

"Monsieur," said he, at length, "why did you not notify me when you saw your affairs becoming entangled and going wrong? My mother was a friend of your mother, and, in remembrance of our old relations, you should have caused me to withdraw from your house the money you were about to involve. Your ruin to-day strips me of everything and plunges me in despair."

Bérard advanced hurriedly and seized Marius' hands.

"Do not say that!" cried he, in a piteous tone; "do not overwhelm me! Ah! you little know what cruel regrets are rending me! When I saw the gulf, I strove to cling to the tree branches; I struggled; until the last moment, I hoped to save the amounts deposited with me. You cannot imagine what terrible risks those who handle money run!"

Marius was speechless. What could he say to this man who excused himself by heaping accusations upon his own head? He had no proofs; he dare not call Bérard a swindler; his only course was to retire quietly. Besides, the banker spoke in a voice so

woeful, in a fashion so touching and so frank, that he almost felt compassion for him. He hastened to withdraw in order to leave him in peace. His misfortune oppressed him.

As he was returning through the empty rooms, the clerk, who had finished his preparations for the removal of his effects, took up his bundle and hat and followed him. This clerk sneered between his teeth, and, at each step, stared at Marius with a strange air, shrugging his shoulders. Outside, on the pavement, he suddenly addressed him:

"Well," said he, "what do you think of the Sieur Bérard? He is a capital actor, is he not? The office door was left open; I laughed heartily to see his disconsolate looks. He nearly wept, the honest man. Allow me to tell you, Monsieur, that you have permitted yourself to be duped in the most polite fashion!"

"I do not understand you," answered Marius.

"So much the better; that proves you to be an upright and just man. As for me, I quit this swindling shop with profound joy. For a long time I suspected what was going to happen; I foresaw the dénouement of this high comedy of robbery. I have a remarkably keen scent for discovering intrigues in a house."

"Explain yourself."

"Oh! the story is a simple one. I can relate it to you in a few words: Ten years ago, Bérard opened a banking-house. To-day, I doubt not that from the

first he was preparing for a failure. This is the way he reasoned: 'I wish to be rich because I have strong appetites, and I desire to get rich as soon as possible because I am eager to satisfy my appetites. Now, the straight road is rough and long; I prefer to follow the by-ways of trickery and gather up my million in ten years. I will become a banker; I will have a safe as a trap for the funds of the public. Each year, I will steal a round sum. This can go on as long as necessary; I will stop when my pockets are full. Then, I will calmly suspend payment. Of two millions, which shall have been confided to me, I will generously restore two or three hundred thousand francs to my creditors. The rest, hidden in a little corner I know of, will help me to live as I desire, in idleness and pleasure!' Now, do you understand, my dear Monsieur?"

Marius heard the clerk with stupefaction.

"But," said he, "what you tell me is impossible. Bérard this instant informed me that his obligations foot up a million and his assets a million, five hundred thousand francs! We shall all be repaid in full; it is merely a matter of patience."

The clerk gave vent to a torrent of laughter.

"Ah! mon Dieu! how innocent you are!" resumed he. "Do you really believe in those assets of a million, five hundred thousand francs? In the first place, they will deduct Madame Bérard's dowry from that sum. Now, Madame Bérard brought fifty thousand francs to her husband, which the latter has trans-

formed, in the marriage contract, into five hundred thousand francs. As you see, it was a little steal of four hundred and fifty thousand francs. A million remains, and that million is almost entirely represented by worthless notes. The process of getting such notes is exceedingly simple. There are, in Marseilles, people who, for a hundred sous, sell their signatures; this easy and lucrative trade brings them in a good living. Bérard has had a pile of notes signed by these men of straw, and has pocketed the money which he claims to-day to have loaned insolvent debtors. If you get a dividend of ten per cent, you may consider yourself fortunate. And that in eighteen months or two years, when the bankruptcy official shall have finished his labors."

Marius was crushed. Thus the fifty thousand francs, left him by his mother, would dwindle to a ridiculous sum, of no use whatever to him. He must have money immediately, and he was told he would have to wait two years. And his ruin and despair were the work of a scoundrel who had just made a fool of him. Anger took possession of him.

"This Bérard is a rascal," said he, indignantly. "He will be vigorously pursued. We should rid society of these crafty men who enrich themselves by the ruin of others. The jail awaits them."

Again the clerk indulged in a burst of laughter.

"Bérard," answered he, "will, perhaps, be sent to prison for a couple of weeks. That's all. You are once more failing to comprehend me! Listen."

The two young men had remained standing upon the sidewalk. The passers pushed against them. They returned to the vestibule of the banking-house.

"You say that the jail awaits Bérard," continued the clerk. "The jail awaits only awkward people. During the ten years he has been maturing and caressing his failure, our man has taken his precautions; such infamy as his is a work of art. His accounts are correct, and he has put the law on his side. He knows in advance the slight risks he runs. The court can at most reproach him with too heavy personal expenses; he will be accused, besides, of having put in circulation a large number of promissory notes, a ruinous method of procuring money. But these faults entail only a derisory punishment. As I have already told you, Bérard will be sent to prison for two weeks or a month at most."

"But," exclaimed Marius, "cannot one proclaim this man's crime in the open street, prove his infamy and cause his conviction?"

"No, that cannot be done! There are no proofs, I tell you. Besides, Bérard has not lost his time; he has foreseen everything; he has made powerful friends in Marseilles, thinking that he would, doubtless, some day need their influence. Now, in this city of clubs, he is a sort of inviolable personage; if one should touch a single hair of his head, all his friends would cry out with grief and rage. He can, at the utmost, be imprisoned a brief period for form's sake. When he is set at liberty, he will unearth his little million,

display his luxury and easily create for himself a new esteem. Then you will meet him in his carriage, reclining upon cushions, and the wheels of his calèche will splash mud over you; you will see him, indifferent and idle, keeping an expensive house and enjoying all the pleasures of existence. And, to worthily crown his success as a robber, people will bow to him, love him and open for him a new credit of honor and consideration."

Marius kept a ferocious silence. The clerk made him a slight bow and said, as he was about to depart:

"It is thus that the farce is played. I had all this on my heart, and am glad I met you and relieved myself. Now, a word of good advice: Keep secret what I have just told you, bid adieu to your money and do not bother yourself any further about this wretched affair. Reflect, and you will see that I am right. Farewell."

Marius was alone. A furious desire seized upon him to return to Bérard's office and slap him in the face. All his instincts of justice and probity revolted and urged him to drag the banker into the street, proclaiming his crime. Then disgust succeeded his fury; he thought of his poor mother, shamefully cheated by this man, and from that instant felt only a crushing contempt for him. He followed the clerk's advice; he strode away from the banking-house, striving to forget that he had had money and that a thief had stolen it from him.

In due time, all the clerk's predictions were fulfilled point by point. Bérard was sentenced for simple failure to a month's imprisonment. A year later, his countenance rosy, his bearing easy and insolent, he displayed throughout Marseilles his joyous, rich man's whims. He clinked his gold in the clubs, the restaurants and the theatres—everywhere, in fact, where pleasures were to be bought. And, upon his path, he always found toadies or dupes who bowed to the very ground before him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEFAULTER.

MARIUS went mechanically to the harbor. He walked straight on, not knowing whither his feet led him. He was as if stupefied. A single idea surged in his empty head, and that idea repeated, like the murmur of a bell, that he must have fifteen thousand francs at once. He cast around him that vague look of hopeless people; he seemed to search the street to see if he could not find between two paving-stones the sum he needed.

At the harbor, a desire for wealth came to him. The merchandise heaped up along the quays, the ships which brought in fortunes, the noise and the stir of the crowd which was making money irritated him. Never before had he felt his poverty. For a moment he was envious, rebellious and full of jealous bitterness. He asked himself why he was poor, why others were rich.

And constantly the sound of the bell murmured in his head. Fifteen thousand francs! fifteen thousand francs! The very thought of them nearly burst his skull. He could not return with empty hands. His brother was waiting for him. He had only a few hours to save him from infamy. And he could find

nothing; his benumbed intelligence did not furnish him with a single practicable idea. He twisted in his powerlessness; he racked his mind vainly; he struggled with rage and anxiety.

Never would he have dared to ask his employer, M. Martelly, for fifteen thousand francs. His salary was too small to guarantee such a loan. Besides, he knew the ship-owner's rigid principles, and feared his reproaches should he admit to him that he wished to buy a conscience. M. Martelly would indignantly refuse him the money.

Suddenly, an idea came to Marius. He would not discuss it with himself, and started in hot haste for his apartment on the Rue Sainte.

In the same house, upon the same landing as himself, dwelt a young employé, named Charles Blétry. Blétry was attached as cashier to the soap manufactory of MM. Daste et Degans. The two young men being neighbors, a sort of intimacy had arisen between them. Marius had been won by Charles' gentleness; Blétry was an assiduous frequenter of the churches, his conduct was exemplary and he seemed to be of the highest probity.

For two years, however, he had indulged in heavy expenses. He had introduced veritable sumptuousness into his little apartment, purchasing carpets, hangings, mirrors and handsome furniture. Since this change, he had come in later at night and lived more luxuriously; but he had always remained gentle and honest, tranquil and pious.

At first, Marius had been astonished at his neighbor's expenses; he could not comprehend how an employé on a salary of eighteen hundred francs could buy such costly things. But Charles had told him that he had recently come into an inheritance, and that he intended soon to give up his situation to live like a prosperous citizen. He had even put himself at his disposal, offering him his purse without restriction. Marius had refused.

Now, he had thought of this offer. He was going to knock at Charles Blétry's door and ask him to save his brother. A loan of fifteen thousand francs would not, perhaps, embarrass that young man, who seemed to throw money out of the windows. Marius counted upon repaying him little by little, persuaded that his neighbor would grant him the necessary time.

He did not find the clerk in his apartment on the Rue Sainte, and, as he was pressed, he determined to go to the soap manufactory of MM. Daste et Degans. This soap manufactory was situated on the Boulevard des Dames.

When he reached it and asked for Charles Blétry, it seemed to him that the people stared at him with a strange air. The workmen told him roughly to inquire of M. Daste, who was in his office. Marius, astonished at this reception, decided to go to the manufacturer. He found him in conference with three gentlemen, who stopped talking as he entered.

"Can you tell me, Monsieur," asked the young man, "if M. Charles Blétry is at the manufactory?"

Daste exchanged a rapid glance with one of the persons present, a stout gentleman, grave and severe.

"M. Charles Blétry will soon be here," answered he. "Be kind enough to wait for him. Are you one of his friends?"

"Yes," replied Marius, frankly. "He lodges in the same house as myself. I have known him nearly three years."

Silence was maintained for a moment. The young man, thinking that his presence embarrassed the gentlemen, added, bowing and going towards the door:

"I thank you; I will wait outside."

Then the stout gentleman leaned over and said something in a low voice to the manufacturer. M. Daste stopped Marius with a gesture.

"Remain, if you please," said he. "Your presence may be useful to us. You ought to know Blétry's habits; you can, doubtless, give us some information in regard to him!"

Marius, surprised and not understanding, made a gesture of hesitation.

"Pardon," resumed M. Daste, with great politeness; "I see that my words amaze you."

He pointed to the stout gentleman and continued:

"Monsieur is the commissaire de police of the quarter, and I have just summoned him to arrest Charles Blétry, who, in two years, has stolen from us sixty thousand francs!"

Marius, on hearing Charles accused of robbery, understood everything. He explained to himself the

young man's reckless expenses. He thanked Heaven that he had not in the past accepted his offers of service. Never would he have believed that his neighbor could be guilty of a base action. He well knew that there were in Marseilles, as in all the great centres of industry, unworthy employés, young men who robbed their employers to satisfy their vices and their love of luxury; he had often heard of clerks who received a hundred or a hundred and fifty francs a month and who yet found the means to lose enormous sums at the clubs, to throw twenty-franc pieces to beggars and to eat at restaurants and cafés. But Charles had seemed so pious, so modest and so honest, and had played the rôle of hypocrite with so much art that Marius had been deceived by these appearances of probity and that he had his doubts even yet, despite M. Daste's formal accusation.

He sat down, awaiting the dénouement of this drama. He could not do otherwise. For half an hour, a dull silence reigned in the office. The manufacturer had begun to write. The commissaire de police and the two agents, mute and as if half asleep, gazed vaguely before them, with a terrible patience. Such a spectacle would have given honesty to Marius, had he lacked it. Nothing could have been more sinister than those three impassible men; they looked like the inexorable law awaiting crime.

A sound of footsteps was heard; the door opened gently.

"Here is our man," said M. Daste, rising.

Charles Blétry entered, suspecting nothing. He did not even notice the persons who were in the office.

"Do you wish to see me, Monsieur?" asked he, in that drawling tone which employés assume when speaking to their chiefs.

As M. Daste looked him in the face with cutting contempt, he turned and saw the commissaire whom he knew by sight. He grew frightfully pale; he realized that he was lost, and his whole body quivered with shame and fear. He had hurled himself headlong into a trap. Seeing that his terror accused him, he strove to appear calm, to recover a little coolness and audacity.

"Yes, I wish to see you!" cried M. Daste, violently. "You know why, do you not? Ah! wretch, you will rob me no more!"

"I do not know what you mean," stammered Blétry. "I have stolen nothing from you. Of what do you accuse me?"

The commissaire had seated himself at the manufacturer's desk to commit the facts of the case to writing. The two agents guarded the door.

"Monsieur," said the commissaire to Daste, "be kind enough to tell me under what circumstances you detected the defalcations which the Sieur Blétry has, as you assert, committed to your detriment."

Daste then related the story of the robbery. He said that his cashier had sometimes been extraordinarily slow in making certain returns. But, as he had unlimited confidence in the young man, he had attrib-

uted these delays to the bad faith of the debtors. The first defalcations must have been made at least eighteen months before. Finally, on the preceding day, one of his customers having failed, Daste himself went to demand the payment of a sum of five thousand francs, and learned that Blétry had collected the amount several weeks previously. The manufacturer, frightened, hastily returned to the manufactory and convinced himself, by running over the cashier's books, that he was nearly sixty thousand francs short.

The commissaire afterwards proceeded to question Blétry. The young man, taken unawares and being unable to deny the facts, invented a ridiculous story.

"One day," said he, "I lost a pocket-book containing forty thousand francs. I dared not admit this large loss to M. Daste. Then I began to take money to gamble at the Bourse, hoping to win and reimburse the firm."

The commissaire asked him for details, perplexed him and forced him to contradict himself. Blétry tried another lie.

"You are right," resumed he: "I lost no pocket-book. I prefer to tell everything. The truth is that I myself was robbed. I lodged a young man who was without bread. One night, he vanished, carrying away with him my collection bag; in that bag was a considerable sum of money."

"Do not aggravate your crime by lying," said the commissaire, with that terrifying patience of the police authorities. "You know that we cannot believe you. You are telling us idle tales."

He turned towards Marius and continued:

"I requested M. Daste to detain you, Monsieur, that you might aid us in our task. The accused is your neighbor, you said. Do you know nothing of his manner of living? Can you not conjure him with us to tell the truth?"

Marius was terribly embarrassed. Blétry filled him with pity; he staggered like a drunken man; he supplicated him with a look. The young fellow was not a hardened rogue; he had, without doubt, yielded to temptations, to cowardice of mind and heart. Nevertheless, Marius' conscience made itself heard; it ordered him to tell what he knew. The young man did not reply directly to the commissaire; he preferred to address Blétry himself.

"Listen, Charles," said he: "I know not whether you are guilty or innocent. I have always seen you good and modest. I know that you support your mother and that you are beloved by all who are acquainted with you. If you have committed a folly, admit your blindness; you will cause those who have had esteem and friendship for you to suffer less by frankly accusing yourself and showing sincere repentance."

Marius spoke in a gentle and convincing tone. Blétry, whom the sharp words of the commissaire had left mute and confusedly irritated, bent beneath the austere indulgence of his former friend. He thought of his mother; he thought of that esteem and those friendships which he was about to lose, and a keen emotion took him by the throat. He burst into sobs.

He wept scalding tears in his hands which he held over his face, and, for several minutes, only his terrible groans of despair were heard. It was a complete confession. Everybody remained silent.

"Yes!" cried Blétry, at last, in the midst of his tears, "I did steal and I am a wretch! I did not know what I was doing. I took at first a few hundred francs; then I wanted a thousand, two thousand, five thousand, ten thousand francs at a time! It seemed to me that some one was pushing me on from behind. My needs and my appetites increased constantly."

"But what have you done with all this money?" asked the commissaire.

"I do not know. I gave it away, spent it in riotous living, and lost it at cards. You cannot imagine the whirl I was in. I was calm in my poverty; I aspired to nothing; I loved to pray in the churches, to lead a holy life like an honest man. And yet I have tasted luxury and vice; I have entertained reckless companions; I have bought fine furniture. I was out of my senses!"

"Can you give me the names of the parties you entertained with the money you stole?"

"As if I knew their names! I made their acquaintance here, there and everywhere—in the streets and at the public balls. They came because my pockets were full of gold, and they left me when my pockets were empty. Then I lost much at baccharat at the clubs. What made me a thief was seeing certain young men belonging to fine families throw money out of the

windows and wallow in wealth and idleness. I wished to have, like them, boon companions, noisy pleasures, nights of gaming and revelry. I needed thirty thousand francs a year and made but eighteen hundred. Then I stole."

The wretch, stifling, choking with grief, let himself fall upon a chair. Marius approached M. Daste, who himself was moved, and begged him to be indulgent. Afterwards, he hastened to withdraw; this scene made his heart bleed. He left Blétry in a sort of stupor, a kind of nervous prostration. A few months later, he learned that the cashier had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

When Marius found himself in the street, he felt greatly relieved. He realized that Heaven had given him a lesson in causing him to witness Blétry's arrest. Several hours before, at the harbor, he had had evil thoughts of fortune; he had felt a sort of hatred for the rich. He had just seen whither such thoughts and such feelings might lead.

And, suddenly, he remembered why he went to the soap manufactory. He had now but an hour left him to find the fifteen thousand francs with which to save his brother.

CHAPTER XV.

PHILIPPE REFUSES TO ESCAPE.

MARIUS mentally acknowledged that he was powerless. He no longer knew where to apply. One does not borrow fifteen thousand francs in an hour, when one is merely a clerk.

He passed slowly down the Rue d'Aix, his brain aching, finding nothing in his benumbed thoughts. Money troubles are terrible; one would rather struggle against an assassin than against the eluding and overwhelming phantom of poverty. Nobody has, up to the present time, been able to invent a hundred-sou piece.

When the young man reached the Cours Belzunce, hopeless and brought to a stand by necessity, he resolved to return empty-handed to Aix. The diligence was about to start; only one place on the impériale was left. Marius took that place joyfully; he preferred to remain in the open air, for anxiety was stifling him and he hoped that the broad country horizons would calm his fever.

It was a sorrowful journey. In the morning he had passed the same trees, the same hills, and the hope which made him smile then threw a mild and delicious brightness over the fields and hillocks. Now, he again saw the same scenes and imparted to them all the sad-

ness of his soul; the country seemed funereal to him. The heavy vehicle rolled onward; the cultivated lands, the groves of pines and the little hamlets stretched out along the highway; and Marius found, in each new landscape, a more sinister mourning, a more poignant grief. Night came on; it appeared to him that the entire region was covered with an immense sheet of black crape.

When he arrived at Aix, he went towards the prison with a lingering step. He said to himself that, no matter how late he might be, he would still bring the bad news too soon. He entered the jail at nine o'clock in the evening. Revertégat and Fine were playing cards at a corner of the table to kill time.

The flower-girl arose, with a joyous bound, and ran to the young man.

"Well?" asked she, with a bright smile, throwing back her head coquettishly.

Marius dare not reply. He sat down, despairingly.

"Why don't you speak?" cried Fine. "Have you the money?"

"No," answered the young man, simply.

He drew a long breath and told them of Bérard's failure, Blétry's arrest and all the misfortunes which had happened to him at Marseilles. He closed by saying:

"Now, I am only a poor devil. My brother will remain a prisoner."

The flower-girl stood in dolorous surprise. With hands clasped, in that attitude of pity which the

women of Provence assume, she murmured, in a tone of lamentation:

"Oh! how hard, how hard!"

She looked at her uncle; she seemed to urge him to speak. Revertégat contemplated the two young people with compassion. They saw that a struggle was taking place in him. Finally, coming to a decision, he said to Marius:

"Listen, Monsieur: My vocation has not so hardened me that I am insensible to the grief of deserving people. I have already told you why I sold you your brother's freedom. But I would not have you think that I am influenced only by the love of money. If unfortunate circumstances prevent you from putting me at present beyond reach of want, I will none the less open the door for Monsieur Philippe. You can help me later; you can pay me the fifteen thousand francs sou by sou, when you are able."

Fine, on hearing these words, clapped her hands. She leaped up on her uncle's neck and kissed him full in the mouth. Marius became grave.

"I cannot accept your devotion," answered he. "I already reproach myself for having made you false to your duty. I refuse to aggravate my responsibility by throwing you, in addition, into the street without a morsel of bread!"

The flower-girl turned towards the young man almost with anger.

"Hold your tongue!" cried she. "Monsieur Philippe must be saved. I wish it. Besides, we can open the prison doors without you. Come, uncle. If

Monsieur Philippe consents, his brother will have nothing to say."

Marius followed the young girl and the jailer, who went towards the prisoner's cell. They had taken a dark lantern and glided through the corridors so as not to arouse attention.

They all three entered the cell and closed the door behind them. Philippe was asleep. Revertégat, moved by his niece's tears, had ameliorated as much as possible for the young man the severe regimen of the prison; he had carried to him breakfast and dinner prepared by Fine herself; he had loaned him books and had even given him a supplementary coverlet. The cell had become habitable, and Philippe was not too weary of it; he knew, besides, that preparations for his flight were being made.

He awoke, and put out his hands effusively to his brother and the flower-girl.

"Have you come for me?" asked he, with a smile.

"Yes," replied Fine. "Dress yourself quickly."

Marius was silent. His heart beat with great thumps. He feared lest an ardent desire for freedom might make his brother accept this flight, which he had deemed it his duty to refuse.

"So, all is understood and arranged," resumed Philippe. "I can escape without fear and without remorse. Have you paid the money promised? Why don't you answer me, Marius?"

Fine hurriedly interposed.

"I told you to make haste!" cried she. "What are you uneasy about?"

She had gathered up the young man's garments; she threw them to him, adding that she would wait in the corridor.

Marius stopped her with a gesture.

"Pardon," said he; "I cannot allow my brother to remain in ignorance of our misfortunes."

And, despite Fine's impatience, he repeated the particulars of his journey to Marseilles. But he offered no advice; he wished to allow his brother full freedom of choice.

"Then," cried Philippe, overwhelmed, "you have not given the money to the jailer! We are without a sou!"

"Don't trouble yourself about that," said Revertégat, approaching. "You can pay me later."

The prisoner was mute. He thought no more of flight; he thought of poverty and of the sorry figure he would cut thenceforward upon the promenades of Marseilles. No more elegant garments, no more idling about, no more love affairs! Besides, he had chivalrous feelings and poetical ideas which prevented him from accepting the jailer's devotion. He returned to his miserable bed, pulled the coverlet up to his chin and said, in a calm voice:

"Well, I will stay where I am!"

Marius' face was radiant. Fine stood as if stupefied.

Recovering herself, the flower-girl strove to prove the necessity of the flight; she spoke of the public exposure, of the infamy of the pillory. She grew animated; she was beautiful in her anger and Philippe gazed at her with admiration.

"My pretty child," replied he, "you, perhaps, might make me yield if I had not become blind and obstinate in this cell. But, truly, I have already committed enough cowardly actions, without burdening my conscience further. Whatever Heaven ordains will take place! But all is not lost. Marius will deliver me; he will find the money, as you will see. You can come for me when you have paid my ransom. Then, we will fly together and I will embrace you!"

He spoke almost gayly. Marius took his hand.

"Thank you, brother," said he. "Have confidence."

Fine and Revertégat quitted the cell. Philippe and Marius remained alone for several minutes. They had a grave and animated conversation: they talked of Blanche and her child.

When the three visitors to the cell had returned to the jailer's lodge, the flower-girl lost all hope and asked Marius what he was going to do.

"I shall make another attempt to raise the money," replied he. "The trouble is that we are pressed for time and that I do not know any one to whom I can apply for a loan."

"I can aid you a little," said Revertégat. "There is in this town, a short distance from here, a banker, M. Rostand, who might be induced, perhaps, to lend you a goodly sum. But I forewarn you that this Rostand has the reputation of being a usurer."

Marius had no choice of means.

"I thank you," said he. "I will see Rostand to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE USURERS.

THE Sieur Rostand was a shrewd man. He carried on his infamous business with great ability. To put an honorable stamp upon his vocation, he had opened a banking-house; he paid his license; he was legally established. On occasion, he even knew how to show a little honesty; he loaned money at the same rate as his brethren, the bankers of the town. But, in his establishment, there was, so to speak, a back shop in which he lovingly elaborated his rascalities.

Six months after the opening of his banking-house, he became the manager of a body of usurers, of a scoundrelly band which entrusted him with funds. The combination was of a patriarchal simplicity. People who had the bump of usury and were afraid to operate on their own account, at their own risk and peril, brought him their money and begged him to make the most out of it he could. He thus controlled a rapid circulation of funds to a considerable amount, and could largely take advantage of the needs of borrowers. Those who furnished the money remained in the background. He solemnly engaged to loan at fabulous rates, at fifty, sixty and even eighty per cent. Each month, the capitalists met at his house; he presented his accounts and

divided the profits. And he so arranged matters as to keep the largest share for himself, to rob the robbers.

He always sought those doing a small trade. When a merchant, the day before an obligation fell due, desired to borrow, he imposed exorbitant conditions upon him. The merchant invariably accepted them. Rostand had thus caused more than fifty failures in ten years. Everything was grist to his mill; he as readily lent a hundred sous to a dealer in vegetables as a thousand francs to a cattle merchant; he systematically sheared the town; he did not lose an opportunity of giving ten francs to secure a return of twenty the next day. He watched the eldest sons of high families, the young reprobates who throw money out of the windows; he filled their hands with gold pieces that they might throw more, and stood below to pick up what fell. He also made trips into the country to tempt the peasants, and, when the harvests failed, tore from them, strip by strip, their farms and their lands.

This house was a veritable trap in which fortunes were swallowed up. People, entire families, whom he had ruined were cited. Everybody knew the secret springs of his trade. They pointed out his capitalists: rich men, former ministerial officials, merchants and even workmen. But they had no proofs. Rostand's license protected him, and he was too cunning to allow himself to be caught at crime.

Once only in his infamous career had he been in danger. The affair made a great noise. A lady belonging to a distinguished family wished to borrow of

him quite a large sum; she was very pious and had dissipated her fortune by giving right and left, by bestowing enormous alms. Rostand, who knew that all her property was gone, told her she must sign her brother's name to some notes; having those forgeries in his hands, he was certain of being paid by the brother, who would be interested in avoiding a scandal. The poor lady signed. Charity had ruined her, and the feeble goodness of her character made her succumb. The usurer had made no mistake in his calculation: the first notes were paid; but, as new obligations were constantly being presented, the brother lost patience and determined to look into the affair. He went to Rostand and threatened to prosecute him; he said he would rather see his sister disgraced than allow himself to be robbed with impunity by a thief like him. The usurer was almost frightened out of his wits; he surrendered the notes remaining in his possession. However, he did not lose a sou; he had loaned the money to the lady at a hundred per cent.

From that day, Rostand was extremely prudent. He managed the funds of the scoundrelly band with a craftiness that won him the admiration and confidence of the capitalists. While the latter promenaded in the sunlight, like good people who rob nobody, he remained buried in a large, gloomy office; it was there that the gold pieces of the society shot up and bore fruit. Rostand had grown to passionately love his trade, his cheating and his robberies. Certain members of the band used their gains to satisfy their pas-

sions, their appetites for luxury and dissipation. His sole delight was in being a crafty knave; he took as much interest in each of his operations as in a poignant drama; he applauded when his sinister comedies succeeded, and then experienced self-satisfaction and the enjoyment of a triumphant author; afterwards, he placed the stolen money on a table and sank into a miserly ecstasy.

Such was the man Revertégat had innocently pointed out to Marius as a person likely to loan him the funds he needed.

The following morning, the young man knocked at Rostand's door about eight o'clock. The house was heavy and square. All the blinds were closed, which gave the front a glacial bareness, an air of mystery and suspicion. An old and toothless woman servant, clad in a rag of dirty calico, partially opened the door.

"Is Monsieur Rostand in?" asked Marius.

"Yes; but he is engaged," answered the servant, without further opening the door.

The impatient young man pushed her aside and entered the vestibule.

"Very well," said he; "I will wait."

The surprised and hesitating servant realized that she could not get rid of such a determined intruder. She decided to take him into the second story, where she left him in a sort of antechamber. The room was small and dark; the walls were covered with greenish paper, which the dampness had discolored in large patches. The only piece of furniture was a straw-bottomed chair; Marius seated himself on it.

In front of him, an open door permitted him to see the interior of an office, in which a clerk was writing with a goose-quill pen, which scratched terribly on the paper. To the left of him was another door, which looked as if it led to the banker's private sanctum.

Marius waited a long while. Pungent odors of old paper lingered around him. The apartment was miserably filthy, and the bareness of the walls gave it a lugubrious aspect. Dust was heaped in the corners, and spiders were spinning their webs on the ceiling. The young man was almost stifled; the scratching of the goose-quill pen, which grew more and more noisy, made him nervous.

Suddenly he heard people talking in the adjoining room, and, as the words reached him clearly and distinctly, he was about to discreetly draw back his chair when certain phrases nailed him to his place. There are conversations to which one can listen; delicacy was not made to protect the privacy of certain men.

A sharp voice, which seemed to be that of the master of the house, said, with a friendly bluntness:

"Messieurs, we are all present; let us talk of serious things. The meeting is called to order. I will render a faithful account of my operations for the month, and we will then proceed to divide the profits."

There was a slight tumult, a sound of individual conversations being brought to a close. Marius, who could not yet understand matters, nevertheless felt a lively curiosity take possession of him; he divined that a strange scene was in progress behind the door.

In truth, the usurer Rostand had assembled his worthy associates of the scoundrelly band. The young man had presented himself at the very hour of the meeting, at the moment the manager was about to exhibit his books, explain his operations and divide what had been cleared.

The sharp voice resumed:

"Before going into details, I must tell you that the results of this month have not been as satisfactory as those of last month. We cleared then, on an average, sixty per cent., but now we have made only fifty-five."

Various exclamations broke forth. One might say that a displeased crowd was protesting in murmurs. There appeared to be at least fifteen persons in the apartment.

"Messieurs," continued Rostand, with a certain jeering bitterness, "I have done all I could; you ought to thank me. The business grows more difficult daily. But here are my accounts; I will rapidly make you acquainted with some of the affairs I have transacted."

A profound silence reigned for several seconds. Then arose a rustling of papers, the slight flapping of the leaves of a ledger. Marius, beginning to comprehend, listened with more attention than ever.

Then Rostand enumerated his operations, giving some explanations in regard to each. He had the noisy and nasal tone of a court tipstaff.

"I loaned," said he, "ten thousand francs to the young Comte de Salvy, a youth of twenty, who will be

of age in nine months. He had lost at cards, and his lady-love, it seems, had exacted from him a large sum. I made him sign notes at ninety days for eighteen thousand francs. These notes are dated, as they should be, on the day the debtor will have attained his majority. The Salvys own large estates. It is an excellent affair."

A fawning murmur greeted the usurer's words.

"The next day," continued he, "I received a visit from the Comte's lady-love; she was exasperated, the young man having given her only two or three thousand francs. She swore that she would bring de Salvy to me, bound hand and foot, to obtain another loan. This time, I will demand the cession of a piece of property. We have still nine months to shear the young idiot, whom his mother leaves without money."

Rostand turned the leaves of the ledger. He resumed, after a brief silence:

"Jourdier—a cloth merchant, who, each month, needs a few hundred francs to meet his obligations. To-day, his stock belongs almost entirely to us. I have again loaned him five hundred francs at sixty per cent. Next month, if he asks me for a sou, I will make him fail and we will seize his merchandise.

"Marianne—a huckster. Every morning, she gets ten francs and returns me fifteen in the evening. I believe she drinks. A small affair, but a sure profit—a fixed income of five francs per day.

"Laurent—a peasant of the Roquefavour district. He has ceded to me, strip by strip, a piece of land he

owned near the Arc. This property is worth five thousand francs; it cost us two thousand. I have expelled our man from the premises. His wife and children came to me and wept over their poverty. You will give me credit for all such vexations, will you not?

"André—a miller. He owed us eight hundred francs. I threatened him with a seizure. Then, he hastened to beg me not to ruin him by making public his insolvency. I consented to make the seizure myself, without the aid of a bailiff, and took more than twelve hundred francs' worth of furniture and linen: that is I gained over four hundred francs by being humane."

There was a little rustle of satisfaction in the assembly. Marius heard the half-suppressed laughter of those men, who were gloating over Rostand's shrewdness. The banker continued:

"Now, we come to ordinary matters: three thousand francs loaned at forty per cent. to Simon, the merchant; fifteen hundred francs at fifty per cent. to the cattle merchant, Charançon; two thousand francs at eighty per cent. to the Marquis de Cantarel; a hundred francs at thirty-five per cent. to the son of the notary, Tingrey."

And Rostand went on thus for a quarter of an hour, reading out names and figures, enumerating loans which ranged from ten to ten thousand francs, and rates which varied from twenty to a hundred per cent. When he had finished, a hoarse, oily voice said:

"You must have been wrong in your statement a little while ago, my dear friend! You have toiled marvellously, this month. All these transactions are excellent. It is impossible for the profits not to average more than fifty-five per cent. You were surely deceived when you announced that figure."

"I am never deceived," answered the usurer, coldly.

Marius, who had almost glued his ear to the door, thought he noticed indecision in the scoundrel's voice.

"I have not yet told you all," continued Rostand, with embarrassment. "A week ago, we lost twelve thousand francs!"

At these words, there were terrible exclamations. Marius hoped, for a moment, that the wretches would strangle each other.

"The devil! Listen to me!" cried the banker, amid the tumult. "I make enough money for you to induce you to pardon me, when, by chance, I cause you to lose in a transaction. Besides, it was not my fault. I was robbed!"

He uttered these words with all the indignation of an honest man. When quiet was somewhat restored, he proceeded:

"This is the whole story: Monier, a grain merchant, a solvent man, of whom I had the most favorable information, asked me for twelve thousand francs. I replied that I could not lend them to him, but that I knew an old miser, who would, perhaps, advance them at an exorbitant rate. He returned the next day, and informed me that he was ready to accept all the condi-

tions. I called his attention to the fact that the miser demanded five thousand francs interest for six months. He consented. You see that it was an affair of gold. While I went to get the funds, he seated himself at my desk and signed seventeen notes for a thousand francs each. I glanced over the papers and placed them on the corner of this table. Then, I chatted a few minutes with Monier, who had arisen; after having pocketed the money, he made his preparations to depart. When he had gone, I thought I would lock up his notes. I took the papers in my hand. Just think of it!—the knave had exchanged the notes for a similar package of derisory bills, smeared with ink, to the order of I know not whom, without signature. I was robbed. I nearly had a rush of blood to the head. I ran after the thief, who was tranquilly walking in the sun on the Cours. At the first word I addressed to him, he called me a usurer and threatened to drag me before the commissaire de police. This Monier has the reputation of being an upright and honest man, and, ma foi! I preferred to hold my tongue!"

This recital was frequently interrupted by the angry comments of the assembly.

"Admit, Rostand, that you showed a lack of energy," said the hoarse voice. "Well, we have lost our money, and will only get fifty-five per cent. Another time, you must watch our interests closer. Now, let us divide."

Marius, despite his anguish and his indignation,

could not repress a smile. The robbery committed by this Monier struck him as in the highest degree amusing, and, at the bottom of his heart, he applauded the knave who had duped another knave.

He knew now what was Rostand's business. He had not lost a word of what had been said in the adjoining room, and he had easily imagined the scene that had been going on there. Leaning slightly forward on his chair, his ear strained, he had seen with his mind's eye the usurers wrangling, with greedy looks and faces contracted by the evil passions which agitated them. Deep indignation had seized upon him at the recital of Rostand's rascalities; he had felt a desire to enter and strike the man.

He experienced a sort of bitter gayety when he remembered his errand in this den of cut-throats. What innocence, good God! It was here that he had thought to find the fifteen thousand francs necessary to save Philippe, and he had waited for an hour that the banker might turn him into the street like a beggar. Or, perhaps, Rostand would ask of him fifty per cent. and impudently rob him. At this thought, at the thought that on the other side of the door was a reunion of wretches who made money on the poverty and shame of a town, Marius suddenly arose and put his hand on the door-knob.

In the apartment was heard the sharp chink of gold pieces. The usurers were dividing their booty. Each was receiving the profit of a month's cheatery. This money they were counting, the music of which volup-

tuously tickled their flesh, gave forth at times the sound of sobs; one might say that the usurers' victims were lamenting.

Amid the echoing silence, the banker's voice uttered only amounts with a metallic sharpness. He dealt out a share to each of his partners; he named a sum and let fall a pile of gold pieces, which struck the desk with a ringing sound.

Then Marius turned the door-knob. With pale face and firm, honest looks, he stood for several seconds silently upon the threshold.

The young man had before him a strange spectacle. Rostand was standing in front of his desk; behind him was an open safe from which he took handfuls of gold. Around the desk, seated in a circle, were the members of the scoundrelly band, some awaiting their share, others counting the money they had just received. Every minute, the banker consulted his accounts, stooping over a ledger, letting the money go with the utmost prudence. His worthy partners were staring greedily at his hands.

At the sound made by the door in opening, every head turned with a sudden movement of terror and surprise. And, when the usurers perceived Marius, grave and indignant, each instinctively placed his hand over his heap of gold. There was a moment of trouble and stupor.

The young man instantly recognized the wretches. He had met them in the streets, with heads held high, with countenances dignified and honest, and he had

even bowed to some of them, who might have saved his brother. They all were rich, honored and influential; among them were former officials, property-holders, men who assiduously frequented the churches and the salons of the town. Marius, on seeing them thus, debased and contemptible, blanching beneath his glances, made a gesture of disgust and disdain.

Rostand rushed towards the intruder. His eyes snapped excitedly; his thick, wan lips trembled; all his reddish and wrinkled miser's mask expressed a sort of terrified astonishment.

"What do you want?" asked he of Marius, hesitatingly. "It is not customary to enter houses in this way."

"I wanted fifteen thousand francs," answered the young man, in a cold and jeering tone.

"I have no money," the usurer hastened to reply, moving towards his safe.

"Oh! rest easy; I have abandoned the idea of being robbed. For an hour past, I have been behind that door and have heard all the details of your meeting!"

This declaration fell like the blow of a club, and made all the members of the scoundrelly band turn away their heads. These men yet possessed the shame belonging to their honorable station; some of them hid their faces in their hands. Rostand, who had no reputation to lose, recovered himself little by little. He approached Marius and cried, in a loud voice:

"Who are you? By what right do you steal into

my house to listen at the doors? Why do you make your way into my private office, if you have nothing to ask of me?"

"Who am I?" said Marius, in a low, calm tone. "I am an honest man and you are a knave! By what right have I listened at that door? By the right that people of probity have to unmask and crush scoundrels! Why have I made my way to you? To tell you that you are a wretch and to amply satisfy my indignation!"

Rostand trembled with rage. He did not seek to explain to himself the presence of this avenger, who hurled truths in his face. He was about to cry aloud and fling himself upon Marius, when the latter stopped him with an energetic gesture.

"Be quiet!" thundered he. "I am on the point of going; I am suffocating here. But I did not wish to withdraw without relieving myself a little. Ah! Messieurs, you have a furious appetite. You share among you the tears and despair of families with a terrible gluttony; you gorge yourselves with robberies and rascalities! I am glad to be able to disturb your digestion a trifle, and make you shiver with uneasiness to the depths of your cowardly hearts!"

Rostand strove to interrupt him. He continued, in a more resonant voice:

"Highway robbers have, at least, the merit of courage. They fight, they risk their lives! But you, Messieurs, steal disgracefully in the darkness, you slink ignobly in the by-ways of a contemptible voca-

tion! And, worst of all, you can live without being knaves! You all are rich! You commit villainy, God save the mark! for amusement and the gratification of your tastes!"

Some of the usurers arose, menacingly.

"You have never seen the anger of an honest man, have you?" added Marius, jeeringly. "The truth irritates and frightens you. You are accustomed to be treated with the consideration due to upright people, and, as you have so arranged matters as to hide your infamies and preserve everybody's esteem, you have at last grown to believe in the respect accorded to your hypocrisy! Well, I desired that once in your lives you might be insulted as you deserve, and that is why I came in here!"

The young man saw that he would be murdered, if he remained. He retired step by step towards the door, holding the usurers in check with his glance. At the door, he paused again.

"I am well aware, Messieurs," said he, "that I cannot drag you before human justice. Your wealth, your influence and your shrewdness render you inviolable. If I were stupid enough to struggle against you, I, certainly, would be the party punished. But, at least, I will not have to reproach myself with having been in the presence of men such as you, without casting my contempt in their faces. Would that my words were a red-hot iron to brand your foreheads with infamy! The crowd in that case would follow you and hoot at you, and then, perhaps, you would profit

by the lesson. Divide your gold; if you have the least bit of probity left, it will burn your hands!"

Marius closed the door and departed. When he was in the street, he smiled sadly. He saw life stretch out before him, with all its shame and misery, and said to himself that he was filling in existence the noble and ridiculous rôle of a Don Quixote of justice and honor.

He thought that, perhaps, it would have been better had he not entered Rostand's office. He had grown indignant to no purpose whatever; he knew that he would correct no one. But, when indignation urged him on, he altogether lost control of himself; he had attacked the usurers through instinct, as any man would crush base and dangerous reptiles.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO INFAMOUS SCOUNDRELS.

WHEN Marius related his adventure to the jailer and the flower-girl, the latter exclaimed:

"We have not advanced a step! Why did you get angry? That man, perhaps, would have loaned you the money."

Young girls have infatuations which give them a certain pliancy of conscience; thus Fine, altogether upright as she was, would, doubtless, have turned a deaf ear to Rostand's rascalities, and, on occasion, would even have made use of the secrets chance had confided to her.

Revertégat was somewhat disturbed at having advised Marius to pay a visit to the banker.

"I forewarned you, Monsieur," said he. "I was not ignorant of the rumors in circulation respecting that man, but I attributed a large portion of them to slander. If I had known the whole truth, I never would have sent you to him."

Marius and Fine passed the entire afternoon in framing extravagant plans, in vainly racking their brains for the means of improvising the fifteen thousand francs necessary to secure Philippe's safety.

"What!" cried the young girl, "can we not find in

this town a stout heart to extricate us from our embarrassment! Are there no rich people here who lend their money at a reasonable rate? Come now, uncle, help us a little. Name me some available person, that I may cast myself at his feet!"

Revertégat shook his head.

"Yes," answered he, "there are stout hearts here, rich people who, perhaps, might aid you. But you have no claim upon their kindness, you cannot demand money of them on the instant. You must address yourself to the lenders, the note-shavers, and, as you have no solid security to offer, you are compelled to have recourse to the usurers. Oh! I know old misers, old knaves, who would be enchanted to hold you in their claws, or who would throw you into the street as a dangerous beggar."

Fine listened to her uncle. All these money questions were confused in her young head. She had a soul so open and so frank that it seemed to her altogether natural and exceedingly easy to ask for and obtain a large sum in a couple of hours. There were millionaires who could so readily dispose of a few thousand francs without the least trouble.

She persisted.

"Think well," said she to the jailer. "Do you really know of no man whatever with whom we can make an attempt?"

Revertégat gazed with emotion at her anxious countenance. He hesitated to spread the brutal truths of life before this child, full of the hopes of youth.

"Indeed," responded he, "I know of no man. I have spoken to you of old misers, of old knaves, who have acquired vast fortunes by shameful means. Like Rostand, they loan a hundred francs to get back a hundred and fifty in three months."

He stopped abruptly and then resumed, in a lower tone:

"Would you like me to tell you the history of one of these men? His name is Roumieu; he was formerly a public official. His specialty was making a terrible hunt after inheritances. Introducing himself into families, called upon by his duties to play the rôle of a confidant and friend, he studied the field and prepared his ambushes. When he encountered a testator of weak and wavering spirit, he became his creature, cozened him, won his favor, little by little, by reverences, cajolery and a shrewd comedy of small cares and filial tenderness. Ah! he was a cunning man! It was a sight to see him put his prey to sleep, make himself supple and winning, worm his way into an old man's friendship. Gradually he drove off the real heirs, the nephews and the cousins; then he wrote a new will which robbed them of their relative's fortune and named him as the sole legatee. He did nothing hastily; he devoted ten years to the attainment of his end, to the proper maturing of his rascalities; he proceeded with feline prudence, crawling in the background unweariedly, and leaping upon his prey only when it lay panting before him, rendered inert by his glances and his caresses! He hunted inheritances as

a tiger hunts a hare, with a silent brutality, a velvet-footed ferocity."

Fine thought she was hearing a tale from "The Arabian Nights;" she listened to her uncle, her eyes wide open with astonishment. Marius had begun to be familiar with roguery.

"And you say that this man has acquired a vast fortune?" said he to the jailer.

"Yes," continued the latter. "Strange examples are cited which prove the extraordinary cunning of Roumieu. For instance, ten or fifteen years ago, he managed to get into the good graces of an old lady who had a fortune of nearly five hundred thousand francs. He actually took possession of her like an evil spirit. The old lady became his slave to such an extent that she refused herself a morsel of bread, in order not to touch the money she wished to leave to this demon who ruled her like a master. She was literally possessed; all the holy water in a church would not have sufficed to exorcise the fiend. A visit from Roumieu plunged her into ecstasies without end; when he bowed to her in the street, she was as if stricken by a fit—she grew red with joy. No one could ever conceive by what flattery, by what adroit and insinuating procedure, the notary had been able to penetrate so far into that heart which excessive piety had closed. When the old lady died, she despoiled her direct heirs and left her five hundred thousand francs to Roumieu. Everybody expected this dénouement."

There was silence for an instant. Revertégat resumed:

"I can cite yet another example. The anecdote contains a cruel comedy and proves Roumieu's rare suppleness. A man named Richard, who had amassed in trade several hundred thousand francs, had retired into the bosom of an honest family, the members of which took care of him and made his old age pleasant. In exchange for this kindly friendship, the former merchant had promised his hosts to leave them his fortune. They lived in that hope; they had numerous children and counted upon establishing them in an honorable fashion. But Roumieu happened to pass that way; he soon became the intimate friend of Richard; he took him occasionally to the country; he accomplished in perfect secrecy his work of taking possession. The family which gave the retired trader a home suspected nothing; the hosts continued to care for their guest, awaiting the inheritance: for fifteen years they had lived thus in delightful quietude, making plans for the future, certain of being happy and rich. Richard died, and, the next day, Roumieu was discovered to be his heir, to the great astonishment and despair of the honest family, robbed of its affection and its rights. Such is the hunter of inheritances. When he walks, his footsteps make no sound: his leaps are too rapid to be noticed; he has already sucked all the blood from his prey before he is seen crouched upon it!"

Fine was shocked.

"No, no," said she, "I will never ask such a man

for money. Do you not know of some other lender, uncle?"

"Ah! my poor child," replied the jailer, "all usurers are alike; all of them have some indelible stain on their lives. I know an old miser, who has a fortune of more than a million francs and lives alone in a dirty and abandoned house. Guillaume buries himself in the depths of his foul-smelling den. The dampness cracks the walls of this vault; the floor is not even paved, and one walks upon a sort of vile muck made of mud and rubbish; spider webs hang from the ceiling, dust covers every object and a dim, lugubrious light enters through the window panes black with grease. The miser seems to sleep in the filth, as the spiders of the beams sleep motionlessly amid their webs. When a victim becomes entangled in the nets he spreads, he draws it to him and sucks the blood from its veins. This man eats nothing but vegetables boiled in water, and never satisfies his hunger. He dresses himself in rags; he leads the life of a beggar and a leper. And all this to keep the money he has already amassed, to constantly augment his treasure. He lends only at a hundred per cent."

Fine turned pale at the hideous spectacle of which her uncle gave her a glimpse.

"But," continued the jailer, "Guillaume has friends who extol his piety. He believes neither in God nor the devil; he would sell Christ a second time if he could; but he has been crafty enough to feign great religious zeal, and this comedy has brought him the

esteem of certain narrow-minded and blind people. One meets him crawling in the churches, kneeling behind all the pillars, using buckets of holy water. Question the town, ask what good action this godly personage has ever performed! 'He worships God,' will be the reply; but he robs his fellow-creatures! No one can cite a person he has assisted. He lends at usurious rates, but does not give a sou to the unfortunate. A poor devil might die of hunger at his door, before he would bring him a morsel of bread and a glass of water. If he enjoys any consideration whatever, it is because he has stolen that consideration like everything else belonging to him!"

Revertégat paused, looking at his niece, uncertain as to whether he ought to continue.

"And what if you should be foolish enough to go to such a man!" said he, at length. "I cannot tell everything; I cannot speak of Guillaume's worst faults. This old man has evil instincts; at times, he forgets his avarice. People whisper of shameful orgies, of revolting dissipation—"

"Enough!" cried Marius, sternly.

Fine, blushing and dismayed, hung her head, having no longer either courage or hope.

"I see that money is too dear," resumed the young man, "and that one must sell himself to buy it! Ah! if I only had the time to earn with my own hands the sum we need!"

They all three remained silent, totally unable to find any means of saving Philippe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

THE following morning, Marius, urged by necessity, decided to apply to M. de Girousse. Since he had been endeavoring to raise the money he needed, he had often thought of making application to the old comte. But he had always recoiled from this idea; he feared the gentleman's singular bluntness; he dare not admit to him his poverty; he was ashamed to tell him what was to be done with the fifteen thousand francs he solicited.

Nothing could be more painful to him than to be obliged to put another party in possession of the secret of his brother's contemplated escape, and M. de Girousse frightened him more than any one else.

When the young man presented himself, the hôtel was empty; the comte had just departed for Lambesc. Marius was almost happy at finding no one, so much did the step he was taking weigh upon him. He stood in the Cours, irresolute, not having the courage to go to Lambesc, disheartened at being brought to a stand.

As he walked away, overwhelmed, with wandering eyes, he met Fine. It was seven o'clock. The flower-

girl, wearing her best dress, holding in her hand a small travelling bag, seemed to him resolute and radiant.

"Where are you going?" asked he, in surprise.

"I am going to Marseilles," answered she.

He stared at her with an air of curiosity, questioning her with a look.

"I can tell you nothing," continued she. "I have a project, but am afraid of failing. I shall return this evening. Don't give up all hope yet."

Marius accompanied Fine to the diligence. When the lumbering vehicle started, he followed it for a long while with his eyes; that vehicle bore his last hope and would bring back to him anguish or joy.

Until evening, he hung around the arriving diligences. Only one more was to come, and Fine had not yet appeared. The young man, gnawed by impatience, walking back and forth with a nervous step, trembled lest the flower-girl should not return until the following day.

In the ignorance in which he was, not knowing what this final attempt might be, he felt that he lacked the courage to pass an entire night of anxiety and indecision. He paced the Cours, quivering, a prey to a sort of nightmare.

Finally, he saw the diligence in the distance, in the middle of the Place de la Rotonde. When he heard the wheels rattle over the paving stones, violent palpitations seized upon him. He placed his back against

a tree, watching the travellers who got out, one by one, with exasperating deliberation.

Suddenly, he stood as if nailed to the spot. Nearly opposite to him, in an open door-way of the diligence, he had just seen appear the tall figure and pale, sad face of the Abbé Chastanier. When the abbé was upon the sidewalk, he put out his hand and helped a young girl to descend. This young girl was Mademoiselle Blanche de Cazalis.

Behind her, Fine leaped to the pavement with a light bound, without making use of the coach steps. She was radiant.

The two travellers, guided by the flower-girl, went towards the Hôtel des Princes. Marius, who had remained in the darkness of the growing night, followed them mechanically, utterly unable to comprehend matters, as if stupefied.

Fine was ten minutes at most in the hôtel. When she came out, she perceived the young man and ran to him, overcome with wild joy.

"I have succeeded in bringing them," cried she, clapping her hands; "now, I hope they will obtain what I desire. To-morrow, we shall know all about it."

Then, she took Marius' arm, and told him what she had done during her absence.

The day before, she had been struck by the young man's remark to the effect that he regretted not having sufficient time to earn with his own hands the sum he needed.

Besides, her uncle's sadness had proved to her that it was almost impossible to find a lender, a reasonable usurer. The question then reduced itself to gaining time, to striving to postpone as far as possible the period when Philippe would be fastened to the pillory.

What terrified Fine and Marius was this disgraceful exposure, which delivered up culprits to the jeers and insults of the crowd.

The young girl's plan was immediately determined upon, a bold plan which, perhaps, would succeed by reason of its very audacity.

Her project was to go straight to the mansion of M. de Cazalis, to make her way to his niece and to spread out before her the picture of Philippe's exposure, with everything such a spectacle would have of a nature insulting to the young lady.

She would prevail upon her to aid her; they would go together to beg the deputy to intervene; if M. de Cazalis did not consent to ask for Philippe's pardon, he would, perhaps, try to obtain a reprieve. Besides, Fine did not reason concerning her method of procedure; it seemed impossible to her that Blanche's uncle could resist her tears. She had faith in her devotedness.

The poor child dreamed wide awake when she hoped that M. de Cazalis would bend at the last hour. That proud and obstinate man desired Philippe's disgrace, and nothing in the world could have induced him to put an obstacle in the way of the accomplishment of

his vengeance. If Fine had been compelled to struggle against him she would have been crushed; she would have utterly wasted her most enchanting smiles and her most touching tears.

Happily for her, circumstances aided her. When she presented herself at the deputy's hôtel on the Cours Bonaparte, she was informed that M. de Cazalis had been called to Paris by certain exigences of his political position. She asked to see Mademoiselle Blanche; the servant vaguely replied that Mademoiselle was absent, that she was travelling.

The flower-girl, greatly embarrassed, was obliged to retire and reflect in the street. All her plans were thrown into disorder; this absence of the uncle and the niece took from her the support upon which she had counted, and there was not a single friend to whom she could turn. She, however, did not wish to lose her last hope and return to Aix as desperate as on the preceding day, after having made a fruitless journey.

Suddenly, she thought of the Abbé Chastanier. Marius had often spoken to her of the old priest; she knew his kindness, his devotedness. Perhaps he could give her valuable information.

She found him at the house of his sister, the aged and infirm workwoman. She opened her heart to him; she explained to him in a few words the motive of her journey to Marseilles. The priest listened to her with marked emotion.

"Heaven has sent you here," answered he. "I

think I can, under such circumstances, violate the secret which has been entrusted to me. Mademoiselle Blanche is not travelling. Her uncle, wishing to keep her out of sight and not being able to take her to Paris, hired for her a small house in the village of Saint-Henri. She is living there with a governess. M. de Cazalis, with whom I am again in favor, begged me to make frequent visits to her and gave me extensive authority over her. Would you like me to conduct you to the poor child, whom you will find much changed and greatly dejected?"

Fine accepted with joy. Blanche turned pale when she saw the flower-girl and began to weep bitterly. A slight bluish circle surrounded her eyes; her lips were discolored and her cheeks as white as wax. One could see that a terrible cry, the cry of the heart and the conscience, had broken forth in her and shaken her determination.

When Fine, in a gentle tone and with compassionate caresses, had made her comprehend that she could, perhaps, save Philippe from a supreme humiliation, she stood firmly up and said, in a broken voice:

"I am ready; dispose of me."

"Well," resumed Fine, eagerly, "aid me in our work of deliverance. I am certain that you will obtain a reprieve, at least, if you try."

"But," observed the Abbé Chastanier, "Mademoiselle Blanche cannot go alone to Aix. I must accompany her. I know that M. de Cazalis, should he hear of this journey, will reproach me in the gravest man-

ner for it. I, however, accept the responsibility of the act, for I firmly believe I am doing my duty as a man!"

When the flower-girl had obtained the consent of both, she scarcely allowed the old man and the young girl time to make a few preparations. She returned with them to Marseilles, pushed them into the diligence and bore them triumphantly to Aix. The next day, Blanche was to go to the President of the court who had pronounced Philippe's sentence.

Marius, when Fine had finished her recital, kissed her warmly on both cheeks, which made a rosy glow mount to the young girl's forehead.

CHAPTER XIX.

A REPRIEVE.

FINE went to Blanche and the Abbé Chastanier the next morning. She wished to accompany them to the door of the President's hôtel, to learn without delay the result of their undertaking. Marius, realizing that his presence would be painful to Mlle. de Cazalis, moved about the Cours like a soul in torment, following the two young girls and the priest in the distance. When the seekers for mercy had entered the hôtel, the flower-girl noticed the young man and made him a sign to join her. They then waited, without exchanging a word, agitated and anxious.

The President received Blanche with great commisseration. He realized that she was the most cruelly stricken of all in this unfortunate affair. The poor child could not speak; she burst into sobs at the first word she attempted to utter, and her whole suppliant being begged for pity more touchingly than her prayers would have done. The Abbé Chastanier was compelled to explain their presence and present the request.

"Monsieur," said he to the President, "we come to you with clasped hands. Mlle. de Cazalis is already broken by the misfortunes which have overwhelmed

her. She prays you in mercy to spare her a new humiliation."

"What do you desire of me?" asked the President, in an agitated voice.

"We desire that you may, if possible, prevent an additional trouble. M. Philippe Cayol has been sentenced to public exposure, and that punishment will shortly be inflicted. But the infamy will not fall on him alone; there will be more than one culprit fastened to the pillory: there will also be a poor, suffering child, who asks pity of you. You understand, do you not? The cries of the crowd, the insults, will rebound upon Mlle. de Cazalis; she will be dragged in the mud by the populace, and her name will circulate around the ignoble post, coupled with hateful jeers and foul expressions."

The President seemed deeply touched. He was silent for a moment. Then, as if seized by a sudden idea, he inquired:

"Did M. de Cazalis send you to me? Is he aware of the step you have taken?"

"No," answered the priest, with frank dignity; "M. de Cazalis does not know we are here. Men have interests and passions which carry them away and, sometimes, prevent them from forming a clear judgment of their position. Perhaps, we are acting contrary to the desire of Mlle. Blanche's uncle in coming to solicit your intervention. But goodness and justice are above the passions and the interests of men. Therefore, I have no fear of compromising

my sacred character in taking it upon myself to ask you to be good and just."

"You are right, Monsieur," said the President. "I understand the motives which have brought you here, and, as you see, your words have strongly affected me. Unfortunately, I cannot prevent the punishment; it is not in my power to modify a decree of the Cour d'Assises."

Blanche clasped her hands.

"Monsieur," stammered she, "I do not know what you can do for me; but, I pray you, be merciful: think that it is I whom you have sentenced, and try to alleviate my sufferings."

The President took her hands and replied, with paternal gentleness:

"My poor child, I understand everything. My rôle in this affair has been painful. To-day, I am grieved that I cannot say to you: 'Fear nothing; I can set aside the pillory, and you shall not be fastened to the post with the condemned.'"

"Then," resumed the priest, in dismay, "the exposure must soon take place. You are not even permitted to retard the deplorable scene."

The President had arisen.

"The Ministre de la Justice, upon the demand of the Procureur Général, can postpone the execution of the sentence," said he, quickly; "do you desire that the exposure shall not occur until the latter part of December? In that event, I shall be happy to prove to you the extent of my compassion and good will."

"Yes, yes," cried Blanche, eagerly. "Postpone the terrible moment as long as possible. I shall, perhaps, be stronger then."

The Abbé Chastanier, who was aware of Marius' projects, thought that, at the President's promise, he ought to retire, without further importunity. He joined Blanche in accepting the offer made to them.

"Very well; it is settled," said the President, accompanying them to the door. "I shall ask that the course of justice be suspended for four months, and I am convinced that my request will be granted. Until then, live in peace, Mademoiselle. Hope; Heaven will, perhaps, send some consolation for your sufferings."

The abbé and Blanche left the house. When Fine perceived them, she ran to meet them.

"Well?" asked she, breathlessly.

"As I told you," answered the Abbé Chastanier, "the President cannot prevent the execution of the sentence."

The flower-girl turned pale.

"But," the old priest hastened to add, "he has promised to interpose to obtain a postponement of the exposure. You have four months before you in which to work for the prisoner's welfare."

Marius, in spite of himself, had approached the group formed by the young girls and the abbé. The street, silent and solitary, lay white beneath the glowing sun of noon; slight tufts of grass surrounded the shining paving stones, and a single lean dog slunk along in the narrow thread of shade which skirted the houses.

When the young man heard the Abbé Chastanier's words, he advanced with a sudden movement and grasped his hands effusively.

"Ah! father," said he, in a trembling voice, "you restore me hope and faith. Since yesterday, I have doubted God! How shall I thank you, how prove to you my gratitude! Now, I feel invincible courage and am certain of saving my brother!"

Blanche, at the sight of Marius, bowed her head. A burning flush mounted to her cheeks. She stood, confused and embarrassed, suffering horribly from the presence of Philippe's brother, who knew her to be a perjurer and whom her uncle and she had plunged in despair. The young man, when his joy had grown somewhat calm, regretted that he had approached. The doleful attitude of Mlle. de Cazalis filled him with pity.

"My brother has been shamefully guilty," said he to her, at last. "But pardon him as I pardon you!"

He could find only those words. He would have liked to speak to her of her child, question her as to the lot in reserve for that poor little being, claim it of her in Philippe's name. But he saw her so overwhelmed that he dare not torture her further.

Without doubt, Fine had comprehended his thoughts. While he walked a few steps with the Abbé Chastanier, she said to Blanche, in a hurried voice:

"Bear in mind that I have offered to be a mother to your child. Now, I love you; I see that you have a stout heart. Make a sign, and I will fly to your aid.

Besides, I will watch; I do not wish the poor little creature to suffer from the folly of its parents."

Blanche silently grasped the flower-girl's hand. That was her sole response. Huge tears ran down her cheeks.

Mlle. de Cazalis and the Abbé Chastanier set out immediately for Marseilles. Fine and Marius hastened to the prison. They informed Revertégat that they had four months in which to prepare for the escape, and the jailer swore to them that he would keep his word, no matter on what day or at what hour they should summon him to do so.

Before quitting Aix, the two young people wished to see Philippe, in order to tell him of what had taken place and bid him hope. That night, at eleven o'clock, Revertégat again took them to the cell. Philippe, who was becoming accustomed to prison life, did not seem to them very greatly dejected.

"Provided that you save me from the ignominy of the public exposure," said he to them, "I will consent to everything. I would rather break my head against a wall than be fastened to the infamous pillory!"

Finally, the next day, the diligence bore Marius and Fine back to Marseilles. They were about to continue the struggle on a larger scale. They were about to search the depths of human consciences and see exposed the vices of a great city, given up to all the disorders of modern industry.

CHAPTER XX.

POLITICS AND JUSTICE.

MEANWHILE, political complications had arisen in Marseilles. The liberals had of late received numerous accessions and felt their power. They were thoroughly dissatisfied with the course of M. de Cazalis as a deputy, and his pride and arrogant conduct as an individual utterly disgusted them. Besides, his merciless persecution of Philippe Cayol, whom they recognized as one of their chiefs, filled them with rage, especially as they knew that in disgracing him the deputy was striking the party and taking revenge for having been compelled in the past to pay court to the republicans.

Another election was approaching, and the opposition loudly declared that M. de Cazalis, who was again a candidate, should not be re-chosen deputy. The canvass promised to be unusually bitter and exciting ; the adherents of Philippe Cayol were everywhere firing the populace and urging that an overwhelming demonstration against M. de Cazalis be made by the masses. In fact, the injustice done to Philippe gave signs of being an important issue in the campaign.

Such was the commotion that the Government, becoming alarmed, had summoned M. de Cazalis to

Paris to confer with him respecting the threatening state of affairs.

Marius and Fine returned to Marseilles when the excitement was at its height. The young man was everywhere received by the liberals with enthusiasm which showed plainly that he had suddenly become a person of importance. The masses cheered him in the streets, and wherever he went crowds of girls of the people waved their handkerchiefs in his honor.

Fine was proud of Marius' vast popularity; she neglected no opportunity of adding fuel to the flames by telling the women what a noble fellow he was, and how he had unselfishly devoted himself to the cause of his brother, the victim of aristocratic tyranny.

Marius had not yet decided what steps to take for furthering the object nearest his heart—the raising of the fifteen thousand francs to secure Philippe's liberation—when, early one morning, there was a sharp knock at the door of his apartment on the Rue Sainte.

The young man opened the door; he was filled with amazement to find that his visitor was M. de Girousse.

"You are astonished to see me here, are you not?" said the comte, in his usual abrupt fashion. "Well, you will be still more astonished when you learn my errand!"

M. de Girousse entered the room and took the chair Marius offered him. His eyes sparkled strangely, as he resumed:

"It is in your power to do a little towards bringing

the proud and slothful nobles to their senses; at the same time, you can save your brother!"

Marius stared at him in stupefaction. The comte continued:

"Do you not know that you are to-day the most popular man in all Marseilles, as M. de Cazalis is the most unpopular? Have you not noticed that the liberals are in the ascendant, that they will surely carry the approaching election? There is your opportunity!"

"I do not understand you," stammered the young man.

"Are you blind!" cried the comte, rising and impatiently pacing the apartment. "The liberals are organized and powerful; they have able leaders; all they need is a suitable and popular candidate. You are that man!"

M. de Girousse stopped in front of Marius and looked him straight in the face.

The young man was astounded. The idea of taking advantage of the political commotion and his personal popularity to oust the deputy from power had never entered his brain.

"But I am no politician," said he; "I am unknown to the leaders of the republicans. Besides, I have not the money to cope with M. de Cazalis in the campaign."

"You are unknown to the leaders of the republicans!" cried M. de Girousse. "Not a bit of it! You are known to all of them; the advisability of your nomination is even at this moment being dis-

cussed. As to money, I will aid you to raise all you may require. I came to Marseilles to tell you this, and also to urge you, if only for your brother's sake, to accept the nomination which will certainly be tendered you."

Marius put his hands to his head in bewilderment. He thought he was dreaming. But a short time before he had been powerless, and M. de Cazalis had towered above him like a giant; now, he was informed that he could humble the arrogant deputy, and that he might speedily have sufficient influence to save Philippe. The comte interrupted his reverie by saying:

"Will you accept the nomination I have spoken of?"

"To help my brother—yes!" replied Marius, with determination.

M. de Girousse then departed, first giving the young man his address in Marseilles, and exacting from him a promise to come to him at once should anything having a political significance occur.

The comte had hardly gone when Fine made her appearance, out of breath and flushed with excitement.

"Do you know what has happened, Marius?" asked she, as soon as she could find words. "No; you could never guess! They say in the streets that the liberals have named you as their candidate for deputy against Blanche's uncle!"

Marius' eyes flashed. Vengeance was, indeed, within his grasp, if nothing more.

"M. de Girousse was here just before you came," said he. "He informed me that my nomination was

probable; he also urged me to accept, offered me money to carry on the canvass, and said that my election meant Philippe's safety!"

Fine clapped her hands joyously.

"You will accept?" said she.

"I will!"

During the day, Marius was officially notified of his nomination and accepted. He had grave misgivings as to the step he was taking, but the thought of his brother nerved and sustained him.

The young man at once sought out M. de Girousse and told him the news. The comte grasped him cordially by the hand, assuring him that his success was now only a matter of time.

On both sides, the campaign was pushed with extreme vigor. The nobles and some of the priests rallied about M. de Cazalis; but a powerful faction of the clergy, headed by the wily Abbé Donadéi, joined the liberal forces. The shrewd Italian had scented the coming storm; with his natural quickness, he saw to which side victory inclined and threw all his weight into the winning scale. M. de Cazalis put in circulation all sorts of slanders in regard to Marius: he was a scoundrel and a reprobate, the terror of honest families, and deserved to be in prison with his infamous brother; if he had his deserts, he would be pilloried with him. The unscrupulous deputy gave the names of people he had ruined, of others whose peace of mind he had forever destroyed. The liberals retorted by asserting that M. de Cazalis had forced his niece to commit per-

jury, to turn against the man she loved; that he had deliberately and in cold blood concocted the outrageous plot to disgrace Philippe Cayol; that he was a wretch and a knave; that he had made capital out of Blanche's flight with which to crush the people in the person of an innocent man, and that he ought to be punished for his crimes instead of being re-elected deputy.

Marius through all this maintained a calm dignity, acting on advice given him by M. de Girousse. But Fine could not be controlled; she was constantly in a fever of excitement, and her enthusiasm for the candidate of the liberals knew no bounds; the indignation she felt at the vile slanders current in regard to Marius fell little short of absolute fury; could she have come in contact with M. de Cazalis, she would have done her best to strangle him.

M. de Girousse did not openly take part in the campaign, but he moved a host of secret springs, making it his business to counteract all the shrewd trickery resorted to by M. de Cazalis and his adherents. Whenever it was known that votes had been purchased for the deputy, the comte promptly furnished money to buy an equal number for Marius. He remained quietly in Marseilles, keeping his eyes and ears wide open.

At length, the election took place, and Marius was triumphantly chosen deputy, M. de Cazalis sustaining an overwhelming defeat.

The first use the new deputy made of his power was

to cause Philippe's case to be reopened by the Cour d'Assises at Aix.

Blanche again appeared as a witness. She had escaped from her uncle's control and, for some time past, had remained in concealment at the house of the Abbé Chastanier's infirm sister in Marseilles, Fine being almost constantly with her and ministering to all her needs like a sister. The poor child stood up in the court-room, pale and trembling, supported on one side by the old priest and on the other by the faithful flower-girl. In an almost inaudible voice, she told the true story of her flight with Philippe, declaring that she had voluntarily followed the young man because she loved him; that she had married him and had always considered herself his wife, and that her statement at the former trial had been dictated to her by her iron-willed uncle, whom she had not had the strength of mind to resist.

The vast audience present received her testimony with murmurs of applause, which were promptly suppressed by the court officials.

Philippe sat in his place, his countenance radiant with joy and hope. On hearing Blanche's evidence, he felt that he loved the young girl more than ever.

The Lambesc inn-keeper repeated that while at his house Mlle. de Cazalis had called Philippe her husband, and Marguerite, the milkmaid, deposed that she now perfectly remembered having carried letters from Mlle. Blanche to her lover.

Marius detailed all that had occurred during his

interview with his brother and the young girl at the house of the gardener Ayasse at Saint-Barnabé; he spoke in a firm, manly tone which carried conviction with it.

The result was the acquittal of Philippe Cayol, and the arrest of M. de Cazalis on the charge of conspiracy to ruin the young man. The gardener Ayasse was released from prison by order of the President.

In due course, Philippe was set at liberty. Marius was waiting to receive him, in company with Fine and the Abbé Chastanier. As the jailer Revertégat delivered his prisoner to them, Marius slipped a packet into his hand.

"Take it," said he; "it contains the fifteen thousand francs promised you. I am happy to give you the sum with the knowledge that you have earned it solely by your kindness and that it is not the price of a criminal act!"

It should be stated here that, immediately after Marius' election, the banker Bérard, becoming frightened, had restored to him the fifty thousand francs left by his mother.

Revertégat took the money and silently walked away, but a suspicious moisture in his eyes told that his heart was touched.

Philippe grasped his brother's hand effusively.

"How can I thank you!" he said.

"By making reparation to the young girl you have wronged!" answered Marius, sternly.

"But will she accept me as her husband, after all my baseness?" asked Philippe, greatly agitated.

Fine came forward and Philippe, with a sudden return of his old inclinations, moved as if to kiss her on the cheek.

"No!" said she, repulsing him with an air of sorrow and regret. "In the sight of God, you are the husband of another! You ask if Mlle. Blanche will accept you. I reply that she will!"

The Abbé Chastanier interposed.

"My son," said he, "I have just quitted Mlle. de Cazalis. Rest assured that she will do everything required of her by the laws of God and human justice."

Philippe looked joyously around him.

"And I, too, will do everything required of me by the laws of God and human justice!" said he, firmly. "But will M. de Cazalis, proud and haughty as he is, sanction our union?"

"As matters now stand," replied the old priest, "the law will permit us to dispense with his consent."

CHAPTER XXI.

REPARATION AND REWARD.

THE interview between Blanche and Philippe was embarrassing. The young girl scarcely lifted her eyes from the floor when her lover came into her presence; he stood for a moment gazing sorrowfully into her pale and altered face.

"Blanche," said he, at last—"my wife!"

He took her hand and softly caressed it.

Courage returned to the young girl; she raised her eyes and gazed tenderly at her lover, but still not a syllable came from her lips, which seemed dry and parched.

"Blanche," continued Philippe, "give me a word of comfort and hope; tell me that you will be mine; tell me that you will consent to have our already pronounced nuptial vows renewed before the Mayor and in church."

The poor girl blushed scarlet and trembled from head to foot, but her lips remained sealed.

"Blanche! Blanche!" cried the young man, in despair, "is all the love you once felt for me cold and dead in your bosom? You are suffering, child; speak!"

Blanche shuddered.

"Do not recall our old love, Philippe!" said she, in a voice quivering with agony; "it was unblest and unholy! I was a rash, inexperienced girl, and did not know what I was doing!"

"So be it," answered Philippe, solemnly: "let our old love perish; but, from its ashes, may not a new and purer love arise—a love the law will authorize and the church sanctify?—the love which unites two hearts and makes them beat with a single throb!"

"Yes," murmured she, "such a love might arise; but I am unworthy of it. I have betrayed you—I have cast you into prison!"

"But you have also delivered me; you were unjust only because your proud and revengeful uncle compelled you to be so; when you were free to act as you chose, you hastened to my relief, to repair the injury you had inflicted on me. I have long since forgiven you, and now I ask you to forgive me."

Philippe spoke with fire and earnestness. Blanche was deeply moved.

"I, too, forgave you long ago," she replied, in an agitated voice.

"Then love me now and be my wife," said Philippe, eagerly; "think of the pure happiness of wedlock; think that our child will be legitimized."

Mlle. de Cazalis burst into tears; Philippe caught her in his arms; he impressed a burning kiss upon her lips.

"Do not refuse me," he pleaded; "I am sincere—I will make amends for all the bitter past."

The young girl did not seek to free herself; she remained passively in her lover's arms; but she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Do you consent to be my wife?" continued Philippe; "do you consent to give me an opportunity to prove that I really love you for yourself alone?"

"Yes," murmured Blanche, "for now I know that you speak the truth!"

At that moment there was a discreet knock at the door, and an instant afterwards the Abbé Chastanier entered the apartment. He saw at a glance how matters stood, and a calm smile lighted up his face.

"My children," said he, "I have brought with me a person who ardently desires to see you, that he may in some measure atone for the misery he has caused you. Shall he come in?"

Blanche and Philippe, in surprise, nodded consent. Their surprise deepened to amazement when the old priest, going to the door, ushered in M. de Cazalis in the custody of two court officers. The ex-deputy was humbled and penitent. Blanche ran to him. He took her hands in his and said, in a voice entirely stripped of its usual haughtiness:

"My child, I come to do you tardy justice. I feel that you can never pardon me for all the evil I have done, but I shall strive, at least, to deserve a kind thought from you."

Turning to Philippe, he added:

"You will soon have your revenge, for I shall be convicted and sent to prison; but, before that supreme

disgrace prostrates me in the dust, let me say that I withdraw all obstacles to your union with my niece; nay, that I freely consent to that union."

He turned and left the room with the officers. Blanche and Philippe tried in vain to stop him.

"Let him go," said the Abbé Chastanier; "he has repented and made amends. God will blot out his crimes!"

A few evenings after this scene, Marius went to Fine's dwelling on the Place aux Œufs in Marseilles. He was evidently a prey to some strong excitement which he did his best to conceal.

At the door, he met the flower-girl's brother Cadet.

"Cadet," said he, in a rather tremulous voice which he strove to render firm, "is your sister within?"

"Yes," replied the young fellow; "but she is terribly dejected. I think that Monsieur Philippe's approaching marriage with Mlle. de Cazalis has something to do with it!" he added, archly.

"Poor girl!" said Marius. "I know she loved him."

He found Fine busily engaged with her bouquets for the following day; but she went about her work mechanically, and, as her brother had said, she was terribly dejected.

The young deputy spoke some comforting words to her, but his excitement betrayed itself to such an extent that his companion at last noticed it and said:

"What is the matter with you, to-night? Has anything gone wrong?"

"No," replied he; "everything is entirely satisfactory, but, the fact is, I have something important to say to you."

"To me!"

"Yes."

"What can it be?" cried Fine, throwing back her head with a remnant of her old coquettishness.

"Only this: I wish to ask you to be Madame Marius Cayol!"

Fine dropped her bouquets, and said, with a hollow laugh:

"Oh! no! That would never do! The honor is too great! A fine figure, indeed, I would cut as a deputy's wife! Besides, my heart is dead!"

"I know you loved Philippe," rejoined Marius; "but, as it is impossible for him to marry two wives, why cannot you make his ugly brother happy? You are as worthy to be a deputy's wife as I am to be a deputy!"

"But you never told me you loved me before to-night!"

"I have loved you for a long while, nevertheless; in fact, ever since, while striving to aid Philippe, you showed me what a great heart you have."

Fine looked serious.

"And shall I tell you something, too, Monsieur Marius?" asked she, blushing.

"Of course; confessions seem to be abundant!"

"Well, then, I will; but, remember, it is a great secret: I have loved you—a little—ever since you

declined to allow my uncle to liberate your brother before we paid him the fifteen thousand francs!"

Marius was not a demonstrative young man, but he could not help giving the flower-girl a rousing kiss full in the mouth.

"When shall the wedding take place?" asked he, gallantly.

"Whenever you like!" answered Fine.

"By the way," said Marius, as a thought suddenly came to him, "why were you so dejected when I came in?"

"Because I fancied that you would not care for me now you had become a deputy!"

In due time, every formality having been complied with, there was a double civil marriage at the mayor's office in Marseilles. The contracting parties were Philippe and Blanche, the newly-chosen deputy and Joséphine Cougourdan, now no longer Fine, the flower-girl. The next day, at the Saint-Victor Church, the Abbé Chastanier celebrated the nuptials of the two couples according to the rite of God.

M. de Cazalis was tried and convicted, but, through the intercession of Marius Cayol, he was sentenced to only a single month's imprisonment.

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER.

By ÉMILE ZOLA.

CHAPTER I.

THE BETROTHAL.

PÈRE MERLIER'S mill, one beautiful summer evening, was arranged for a grand fête. In the courtyard were three tables, placed end to end, which awaited the guests. Every one knew that Françoise, Merlier's daughter, was that night to be betrothed to Dominique, a young man who was accused of idlenesss, but whom the fair sex for three leagues around gazed at with sparkling eyes, such a fine appearance had he.

Père Merlier's mill was pleasing to look upon. It stood exactly in the centre of Rocreuse, where the highway made an elbow. The village had but one street, with two rows of huts, a row on each side of the road; but, at the elbow, meadows spread out and huge trees, which lined the banks of the Morelle, covered the extremity of the valley with lordly shade. There was not, in all Lorraine, a corner of nature more adorable. To the right and to the left, thick woods, centenarian forests, towered up from gentle

slopes, filling the horizon with a sea of verdure, while, towards the south, the plain stretched away, of marvellous fertility, displaying as far as the eye could reach patches of ground divided by green hedges. But what constituted the special charm of Rocreuse was the coolness of that cut of verdure in the most sultry days of July and August. The Morelle descended from the forests of Gagny, and seemed to have gathered the cold from the foliage beneath which it flowed for leagues; it brought with it the murmuring sounds, the icy and concentrated shade of the woods. And it was not the sole source of coolness: all sorts of flowing streams gurgled through the forests; at each step, springs bubbled up; one felt, on following the narrow pathways, that there must exist subterranean lakes which pierced through beneath the moss and availed themselves of the smallest crevices, at the feet of trees or between the rocks, to burst forth in crystalline fountains. The whispering voices of these brooks were so numerous and so loud that they drowned the song of the bullfinches. It was like some enchanted park, with cascades falling from every portion.

Below, the meadows were damp. Gigantic chestnut trees cast dark shadows. On the borders of the meadows, long hedges of poplars exhibited in lines their rustling branches. Two avenues of enormous plane trees stretched across the fields towards the ancient Château de Gagny, then a mass of ruins. In this constantly watered district, the grass grew to an

extraordinary height. It resembled a garden between two wooded hills, a natural garden, of which the meadows were the lawns, the giant trees marking the colossal flower-beds. When the sun's rays, at noon, poured straight downward, the shadows assumed a bluish tint, the scorched grass slept in the heat, while an icy shiver passed beneath the foliage.

And there it was that Père Merlier's mill enlivened with its tic-tac a corner of wild verdure. The structure, built of plaster and planks, seemed as old as the world. It dipped partially in the Morelle, which rounded at that point into a transparent basin. A sluice had been made, and the water fell from a height of several mètres upon the mill wheel, which cracked as it turned, with the asthmatic cough of a faithful servant grown old in the house. When Père Merlier was advised to change it, he shook his head, saying that a new wheel would be lazier and would not so well understand the work; and he mended the old one with whatever he could put his hands on: cask staves, rusty iron, zinc and lead. The wheel appeared gayer than ever for it, with its profile grown odd, all plumed with grass and moss. When the water beat upon it with its silvery flood, it was covered with pearls, its strange carcass wore a sparkling attire of necklaces of mother-of-pearl.

The part of the mill which dipped in the Morelle had the air of a barbaric arch, stranded there. A full half of the structure was built on piles. The water flowed beneath the floor, and deep places were there, renowned

throughout the district for the enormous eels and crayfish caught in them. Below the fall, the basin was as clear as a mirror, and, when the wheel did not cover it with foam, schools of huge fish could be seen, swimming with the slowness of a squadron. Broken steps led down to the river, near a stake to which a boat was moored. A wooden gallery passed above the wheel. Windows opened, pierced irregularly. It was a pell-mell of corners, of little walls, of constructions added too late, of beams and of roofs, which gave the mill the aspect of an old, dismantled citadel. But ivy had grown; all sorts of clinging plants stopped the too wide chinks and threw a green cloak over the ancient building. The young ladies who passed by sketched Père Merlier's mill in their albums.

On the side facing the highway, the structure was more solid. A stone gateway opened upon the wide courtyard, which was bordered to the right and to the left by sheds and stables. Beside a well, an immense elm covered half the courtyard with its shadow. In the background, the building displayed the four windows of its second-story, surmounted by a pigeon house. Père Merlier's sole vanity was to have this front plastered every ten years. It had just received a new coating, and dazzled the village when the sun shone on it at noon.

For twenty years, Père Merlier had been mayor of Rocreuse. He was esteemed for the fortune he had acquired. His wealth was estimated at something like eighty thousand francs, amassed sou by sou.

When he married Madeleine Guillard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, he possessed only his two arms. But Madeleine never repented of her choice, so briskly did he manage the business. Now, his wife was dead, and he remained a widower with his daughter Françoise. Certainly, he might have rested, allowed the mill wheel to slumber in the moss; but that would have been too dull for him, and in his eyes the building would have seemed dead. He toiled on for pleasure.

Père Merlier was a tall old man, with a long, still face, who never laughed, but who possessed, notwithstanding, a very gay heart. He had been chosen mayor because of his money, and also on account of the imposing air he could assume during a marriage ceremony.

Françoise Merlier was just eighteen. She did not pass for one of the handsome girls of the district, as she was not robust. Up to her fifteenth year, she had been even ugly.

The Rocreuse people had not been able to understand why the daughter of Père and Mère Merlier, both of whom had always enjoyed excellent health, grew ill and with an air of regret. But, at fifteen, though yet delicate, her little face became one of the prettiest in the world. She had black hair, black eyes, and was as rosy as a peach; her lips constantly wore a smile, there were dimples in her cheeks, and her fair forehead seemed crowned with sunlight. Although not considered robust in the

district, she was far from thin; the idea was simply that she could not lift a sack of grain; but she would become plump as she grew older—she would eventually be as round and dainty as a quail. Her father's long periods of silence had made her thoughtful very young. If she smiled constantly, it was to please others. By nature she was serious.

Of course, all the young men of the district paid court to her, more on account of her écus than her pretty ways. At last, she made a choice which scandalized the community.

On the opposite bank of the Morelle lived a tall youth named Dominique Penquer. He did not belong to Rocreuse. Ten years before, he had arrived from Belgium as the heir of his uncle, who had left him a small property upon the very border of the forest of Gagny, just opposite the mill, a few gunshots distant. He had come to sell this property, he said, and return home. But the district charmed him, it appeared, for he did not quit it. He was seen cultivating his little field, gathering a few vegetables upon which he subsisted. He fished and hunted; many times, the forest guards nearly caught him and were on the point of drawing up procès-verbaux against him. This free existence, the resources of which the peasants could not clearly discover, at length gave him a bad reputation. He was vaguely styled a poacher. At any rate, he was lazy, for he was often found asleep on the grass when he should have been at work. The hut he inhabited, beneath the last

trees on the edge of the forest, did not seem at all like the dwelling of an honest young fellow. If he had had dealings with the wolves of the ruins of Gagny, the old women would not have been the least bit surprised. Nevertheless, the young girls sometimes risked defending him, for this doubtful man was superb; supple and tall as a poplar, he had a very white skin, with flaxen hair and beard which gleamed like gold in the sun.

One fine morning, Françoise declared to Père Merlier that she loved Dominique and would never wed any other man.

It may well be imagined what a blow this was to Père Merlier. He said nothing, according to his custom, but his face grew thoughtful and his internal gayety no longer sparkled in his eyes. He looked gruff for a week. Françoise also was exceedingly grave. What tormented Père Merlier was to find out how this rogue of a poacher had managed to fascinate his daughter. Dominique had never visited the mill. The miller watched and saw the gallant, on the other side of the Morelle, stretched out upon the grass and feigning to be asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window. Everything was plain: they had fallen in love by casting sheep's eyes at each other over the mill wheel.

Another week went by. Françoise became more and more grave. Père Merlier still said nothing. Then, one evening, he himself silently brought in Dominique. Françoise, at that moment, was setting the table. She

did not seem astonished; she contented herself with putting on an additional plate, knife and fork; but the little dimples were again seen in her cheeks and her smile reappeared. That morning, Père Merlier had sought out Dominique in his hut on the border of the wood.

There, the two men had talked for three hours, with doors and windows closed. What was the purport of their conversation no one ever knew. Certain it was, however, that Père Merlier, on taking his departure, already called Dominique his son-in-law. Without doubt, the old man had found the youth he had gone to seek—a worthy youth—in the lazy fellow who stretched himself out upon the grass to make the girls fall in love with him.

All Rocreuse clamored. The women at the doors had plenty to say on the subject of the folly of Père Merlier, who had thus introduced a reprobate into his house. The miller let people talk on. Perhaps, he remembered his own marriage. He was without a sou when he wedded Madeleine and her mill; this, however, had not prevented him from making a good husband. Besides, Dominique cut short the gossip by going so vigorously to work that all the district was amazed. The miller's assistant had just been drawn to serve as a soldier, and Dominique would not suffer another to be engaged. He carried the sacks, drove the cart, fought with the old mill wheel when it refused to turn, and all this with such good will that people came to see him out of curiosity. Père Merlier

had his silent laugh. He was excessively proud of having formed a correct estimate of this youth. There is nothing like love to give courage to young folks. Amid all these heavy labors, Françoise and Dominique adored each other. They did not indulge in lovers' talks, but there was a smiling gentleness in their glances.

Up to that time, Père Merlier had not spoken a single word on the subject of marriage, and they respected this silence, awaiting the old man's will. Finally, one day towards the middle of July, he caused three tables to be placed in the courtyard, beneath the great elm, and invited his friends of Rocreuse to come in the evening and drink a glass of wine with him.

When the courtyard was full and all had their glasses in their hands, Père Merlier raised his very high and said:

"I have the pleasure to announce to you that Françoise will wed this young fellow here in a month, on Saint-Louis' Day."

Then, they drank noisily. Everybody smiled. But Père Merlier, again lifting his voice, exclaimed:

"Dominique, embrace your fiancée. It is your right."

They embraced, blushing to the tips of their ears, while all the guests laughed joyously. It was a genuine fête. They emptied a small cask of wine. Then, when all were gone but intimate friends, the conversation was carried on without noise. The night

had fallen, a starry and cloudless night. Dominique and Françoise, seated side by side on a bench, said nothing.

An old peasant spoke of the war the Emperor had declared against Prussia. All the village lads had already departed. On the preceding day troops had again passed through the place. There was going to be hard fighting.

"Bah!" said Père Merlier, with the selfishness of a happy man, "Dominique is a foreigner; he will not go to the war. And, if the Prussians come here, he will be on hand to defend his wife!"

The idea that the Prussians might come there seemed a good joke. They were going to receive a sound whipping, and the affair would soon be over.

"I have already seen them, I have already seen them," repeated the old peasant, in a hollow voice.

There was silence. Then, they drank again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing; they had gently taken each other by the hand, behind the bench, so that nobody could see them, and it seemed so delightful that they remained where they were, their eyes plunged into the depths of the shadows.

What a warm and superb night it was! The village slumbered on both edges of the white highway in infantile quietude. From time to time was heard the crowing of some chanticleer aroused too soon. From the huge woods near by came long breaths, which passed over the roofs like caresses. The meadows, with their dark shadows, assumed a mysterious and

dreamy majesty, while all the springs, all the flowing waters which gurgled in the darkness seemed to be the cool and rhythmical respiration of the sleeping country. Occasionally, the ancient mill wheel, lost in a doze, appeared to dream like those old watch-dogs that bark while snoring; it cracked, it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, the surface of which gave forth the musical and continuous sound of an organ pipe. Never had more profound peace descended upon a happier corner of nature.

CHAPTER II.

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL.

A MONTH later, on the day preceding that of Saint-Louis, Rocreuse was in a state of terror. The Prussians had beaten the Emperor and were advancing by forced marches towards the village. For a week past, people who hurried along the highway had been announcing them thus: "They are at Lormière—they are at Novelles!" and, on hearing that they were drawing near so rapidly, Rocreuse, every morning, expected to see them descend from the woods of Gagny. They did not come, however, and that increased the fright. They would surely fall upon the village during the night and slaughter everybody.

That morning, a little before sunrise, there was an alarm. The inhabitants were awakened by the loud tramp of men on the highway. The women were already on their knees, making the sign of the cross, when some of the people, peering cautiously through the partially opened windows, recognized the red pantaloons. It was a French detachment. The captain immediately asked for the mayor of the district, and remained at the mill, after having talked with Père Merlier.

The sun rose gayly, that morning. It would be hot

at noon. Over the woods floated a golden brightness, while, in the distance, white vapors arose from the meadows. The neat and pretty village awoke amid the fresh air, and the country, with its river and its springs, had the moist sweetness of a bouquet. But that beautiful day caused nobody to smile. The captain was seen to take a turn around the mill, examine the neighboring houses, pass to the other side of the Morelle, and from there study the district with a field-glass; Père Merlier, who accompanied him, seemed to be giving him explanations. Then, the captain posted soldiers behind the walls, behind the trees and in the ditches. The main body of the detachment encamped in the courtyard of the mill. Was there going to be a battle? When Père Merlier returned, he was questioned. He nodded his head, without speaking. Yes, there was going to be a battle!

Françoise and Dominique were in the courtyard; they looked at him. At last, he took his pipe from his mouth, and said:

"Ah! my poor young ones, you cannot get married to-morrow!"

Dominique, his lips pressed together, with an angry frown on his forehead, at times raised himself on tip-toe and fixed his eyes upon the woods of Gagny, as if he wished to see the Prussians arrive. Françoise, very pale and serious, came and went, furnishing the soldiers with what they needed. The troops were making soup in a corner of the courtyard; they joked while waiting for it to get ready.

The captain was delighted. He had visited the chambers and the huge hall of the mill which looked out upon the river. Now, seated beside the well, he was conversing with Père Merlier.

"Your mill is a real fortress," said he. "We can hold it without difficulty until evening. The bandits are late. They ought to be here."

The miller was grave. He saw his mill burning like a torch; but he uttered no complaint, thinking such a course useless. He merely said:

"You had better hide the boat behind the wheel; there is a place there just fit for that purpose. Perhaps, it will be useful to have the boat."

The captain gave the requisite order. This officer was a handsome man of forty; he was tall and had an amiable countenance. The sight of Françoise and Dominique seemed to please him. He contemplated them as if he had forgotten the coming struggle. He followed Françoise with his eyes, and his look told plainly that he thought her charming. Then, turning towards Dominique, he asked, suddenly:

"Why are you not in the army, my good fellow?"

"I am a foreigner," answered the young man.

The captain evidently did not attach much weight to this reason. He winked his eye and smiled. Françoise was more agreeable company than a cannon. On seeing him smile, Dominique added:

"I am a foreigner, but I can put a ball in an apple at five hundred mètres. There is my hunting gun behind you."

"You may have use for it," responded the captain, dryly.

Françoise had approached, somewhat agitated. Without heeding the strangers present, Dominique took and grasped in his the two hands she extended to him as if to put herself under his protection. The captain smiled again, but said not a word. He remained seated, his sword across his knees and his eyes plunged into space, lost in a reverie.

It was already ten o'clock. The heat had become very great. A heavy silence prevailed. In the courtyard, in the shadows of the sheds, the soldiers had begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village; all its inhabitants had barricaded the doors and windows of their houses. A dog, alone upon the highway, howled. From the neighboring forests and meadows, swooning in the heat, came a prolonged and distant voice, made up of all the scattered breaths. A cuckoo sang. Then, the silence grew more intense.

Suddenly, in that slumbering air, a shot was heard. The captain leaped briskly to his feet, the soldiers left their plates of soup, yet half full. In a few seconds everybody was at the post of duty; from bottom to top the mill was occupied. Meanwhile, the captain, who had gone out upon the road, had discovered nothing; to the right and to the left, the highway stretched out, empty and white. A second shot was heard, and still nothing visible, not even a shadow. But, as he was returning, the captain perceived in the direction of Gagny, between two trees, a light puff of smoke

whirling away like thistledown. The wood was calm and peaceful.

"The bandits have thrown themselves into the forest," muttered he. "They know we are here."

Then the firing continued, growing more and more vigorous, between the French soldiers, posted around the mill, and the Prussians, hidden behind the trees. The balls whistled above the Morelle, without damaging either side. The fusillade was irregular, the shots coming from every bush; and still only the little puffs of smoke, tossed gently by the breeze, were seen. This lasted nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune with an air of indifference. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves on tiptoe and looked over a low wall. They were particularly interested in a little soldier, posted on the shore of the Morelle, behind the remains of an old batteau; he stretched himself out flat on the ground, watched, fired, and then glided into a ditch a trifle further back to reload his gun; and his movements were so droll, so tricky and so supple, that they smiled as they looked at him. He must have perceived the head of a Prussian, for he arose quickly and brought his weapon to his shoulder; but, before he could fire, he uttered a cry, fell and rolled into the ditch, where, for an instant, his legs twitched convulsively like the claws of a chicken just killed. The little soldier had received a ball full in the breast. He was the first man slain. Instinctively, Françoise seized Dominique's hand and clasped it with a nervous contraction.

"Move away," said the captain. "You are within range of the balls."

At that moment, a sharp little thud was heard in the old elm, and a fragment of a branch came whirling down. But the two young folks did not stir; they were nailed to the spot by anxiety to see what was going on. On the edge of the wood, a Prussian had suddenly come out from behind a tree as from a theatre stage entrance, beating the air with his hands and falling backwards. Nothing further moved; the two corpses seemed asleep in the broad sunlight; not a living soul was seen in the scorching country. Even the crack of the fusillade had ceased. The Morelle alone whispered in its clear tones.

Père Merlier looked at the captain with an air of surprise, as if to ask him if the struggle was over.

"They are getting ready for something worse," muttered the officer. "Don't trust appearances. Move away from there."

He had not finished speaking when there was a terrible discharge of musketry. The great elm was riddled and a host of leaves shot into the air. The Prussians had happily fired too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried Françoise away, while Père Merlier followed them, shouting:

"Go down into the cellar; the walls are solid!"

But they did not heed him; they entered the huge hall, where ten soldiers were waiting in silence, watching through the chinks in the closed window-shutters. The captain was alone in the courtyard, crouching

behind the little wall, while the furious discharges continued. Without, the soldiers he had posted gave ground only foot by foot. However, they re-entered one by one, crawling, when the enemy had dislodged them from their hiding-places. Their orders were to gain time, and not show themselves that the Prussians might remain in ignorance as to what force was before them. Another hour went by. As a sergeant arrived, saying that but two or three more men remained without, the captain glanced at his watch, muttering:

"Half-past two o'clock. We must hold the position four hours longer."

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be closed, and every preparation was made for an energetic resistance. As the Prussians were on the opposite side of the Morelle, an immediate assault was not to be feared. There was a bridge two kilomètres away, but they evidently were not aware of its existence, and it was hardly likely that they would attempt to ford the river. The officer, therefore, simply ordered the highway to be watched. Every effort would be made in the direction of the country.

Again the fusillade had ceased. The mill seemed dead beneath the glowing sun. Not a shutter was open; no sound came from the interior. At length, little by little, the Prussians showed themselves at the edge of the forest of Gagny. They stretched their necks, and grew bold. In the mill, several soldiers had already raised their guns to their shoulders; but the captain cried:

"No, no; wait. Let them come nearer."

They were exceedingly prudent, gazing at the mill with a suspicious air. The silent and sombre old structure, with its curtains of ivy, filled them with uneasiness. Nevertheless, they advanced. When fifty of them were in the opposite meadow, the officer uttered the single word:

"Fire!"

A crash was heard; isolated shots followed. Françoise, all of a tremble, had mechanically put her hands to her ears. Dominique, behind the soldiers, looked on; when the smoke had somewhat lifted, he saw three Prussians stretched upon their backs in the centre of the meadow. The others had thrown themselves behind the willows and poplars. Then, the siege began.

For more than an hour, the mill was riddled with balls. They dashed against the old walls like hail. When they struck the stones they were heard to flatten and fall into the water. They buried themselves in the wood with a hollow sound. Occasionally, a sharp crack announced that the mill wheel had been hit. The soldiers in the interior were careful of their shots; they fired only when they could take aim. From time to time, the captain consulted his watch. As a ball broke a shutter and ploughed into the ceiling, he said to himself:

"Four o'clock. We shall never be able to hold out!"

Little by little, the terrible fusillade weakened the old mill. A shutter fell into the water, pierced like a

bit of lace, and it was necessary to replace it with a mattress. Père Merlier constantly exposed himself to ascertain the extent of the damage done to his poor wheel, the cracking of which made his heart ache. All would be over with it this time; never could he repair it. Dominique had implored Françoise to withdraw, but she had refused to leave him; she was seated behind a huge oaken clothes-press, which protected her. A ball, however, struck the clothes-press, the sides of which gave forth a hollow sound. Then, Dominique placed himself in front of Françoise. He had not yet fired a shot; he held his gun in his hand, but was unable to approach the windows, which were altogether occupied by the soldiers. At each discharge, the floor shook.

"Attention! attention!" suddenly cried the captain.

He had just seen a great dark mass emerge from the wood. Immediately a formidable platoon fire opened. It was like a water-spout passing over the mill. Another shutter was shattered, and, through the gaping opening of the window, the balls entered. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor. One of them lay like a stone; they pushed the body against the wall because it was in the way. The other twisted in agony, begging his comrades to finish him; but they paid no attention to him. The balls entered in a constant stream; each man took care of himself and strove to find a loop-hole through which to return the fire. A third soldier was hit; he uttered not a word; he fell on the edge of a table, with eyes fixed and haggard. Opposite these dead men, Françoise, stricken with hor-

ror, had mechanically pushed away her chair to sit on the floor against the wall; she thought she would take up less room there and not be in so much danger. Meanwhile, the soldiers had collected all the mattresses of the household and partially stopped up the window with them. The hall was filled with wrecks, with broken weapons and demolished furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain, "Keep up your courage! They are about to try to cross the river!"

At that moment, Françoise uttered a cry. A ball which had ricochetted had grazed her forehead. Several drops of blood appeared. Dominique stared at her; then, approaching the window, he fired his first shot. Once started, he did not stop. He loaded and fired without heeding what was passing around him, but from time to time he glanced at Françoise. He was very deliberate and aimed with care. The Prussians, keeping beside the poplars, attempted the passage of the Morelle, as the captain had predicted; but, as soon as a man strove to cross, he fell, shot in the head by Dominique. The captain, who had his eyes on the young man, was amazed. He complimented him, saying that he should be glad to have many such skilful marksmen. Dominique did not hear him. A ball cut his shoulder, another wounded his arm, but he continued to fire.

There were two more dead men. The mangled mattresses no longer stopped the windows. The last discharge seemed as if it would have carried away the mill. The position had ceased to be tenable. Nevertheless, the captain said, firmly:

"Hold your ground for half an hour more!"

Now, he counted the minutes. He had promised his chiefs to hold the enemy in check there until evening, and he would not give an inch before the hour he had fixed on for the retreat. He preserved his amiable air and smiled upon Françoise to reassure her. He had picked up the gun of a dead soldier and himself was firing.

Only four soldiers remained in the hall. The Prussians appeared in a body on the other side of the Morelle, and it was clear that they intended speedily to cross the river. A few minutes more elapsed. The stubborn captain would not order the retreat. Just then, a sergeant hastened to him and said:

"They are upon the highway; they will take us in the rear!"

The Prussians must have found the bridge. The captain pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"Five minutes longer," said he. "They cannot get here before that time!"

Then, at six o'clock exactly, he at last consented to lead his men out through a little door which opened into a lane. From there they threw themselves into a ditch; they gained the forest of Sauval. Before taking his departure, the captain bowed very politely to Père Merlier and made his excuses, adding:

"Amuse them! We will return!"

Dominique was now alone in the hall. He was still firing, hearing nothing, understanding nothing. He felt only the need of defending Françoise. He had

not the least suspicion in the world that the soldiers had retreated. He aimed and killed his man at every shot. Suddenly, there was a loud noise. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from behind. Dominique fired a last shot, and they fell upon him while his gun was yet smoking.

Four men held him. Others vociferated around him in a frightful language. They were ready to slaughter him on the spot. Françoise, with a supplicating look, had cast herself before him. But an officer entered and ordered the prisoner to be delivered up to him. After exchanging a few words in German with the soldiers, he turned towards Dominique and said to him, roughly, in very good French:

"You will be shot in two hours!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FLIGHT.

IT was a settled rule of the German staff that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands should be shot. The militia companies themselves were not recognized as belligerents. By thus making terrible examples of the peasants who defended their homes, the Germans hoped to prevent the levy en masse, which they feared.

The officer, a tall, lean man of fifty, briefly questioned Dominique. Although he spoke remarkably pure French, he had a stiffness altogether Prussian.

"Do you belong to this district?" asked he.

"No; I am a Belgian," answered the young man.

"Why then did you take up arms? The fighting did not concern you!"

Dominique made no reply. At that moment, the officer saw Françoise who was standing by, very pale, listening; upon her white forehead her slight wound had put a red bar. He looked at the young folks, one after the other, seemed to understand matters and contented himself with adding:

"You do not deny having fired, do you?"

"I fired as often as I could!" responded Dominique, tranquilly.

This confession was useless, for he was black with powder, covered with sweat and stained with a few drops of blood which had flowed from the scratch on his shoulder.

"Very well," said the officer. "You will be shot in two hours!"

Françoise did not cry out. She clasped her hands and raised them with a gesture of mute despair. The officer noticed this gesture. Two soldiers had taken Dominique to a neighboring apartment, where they were to keep watch over him. The young girl had fallen upon a chair, totally overcome; she could not weep, she was suffocating. The officer had continued to examine her. At last, he spoke to her.

"Is that young man your brother?" he demanded.

She shook her head negatively. The German stood stiffly on his feet, without a smile. Then, after a short silence, he again asked:

"Has he lived long in the district?"

She nodded affirmatively.

"In that case, he ought to be thoroughly acquainted with the neighboring forests."

This time, she spoke.

"He is thoroughly acquainted with them, Monsieur," said she, looking at him with considerable surprise.

He said nothing further to her, but turned upon his heel, demanding that the mayor of the village should be brought to him. But Françoise had arisen, with a slight blush on her countenance; thinking that she

had seized the aim of the officer's questions, she had recovered hope. She herself ran to find her father.

Père Merlier, as soon as the firing had ceased, had quickly descended to the wooden gallery to examine his wheel. He adored his daughter; he had a solid friendship for Dominique, his future son-in-law; but his wheel also held a large place in his heart. Since the two young ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fight, he thought of his other tenderness, which had suffered greatly. Bent over the huge wooden carcass, he was studying its wounds with a sad air. Five buckets were shattered to pieces; the central framework was riddled. He thrust his fingers in the bullet holes to measure their depth; he thought how he could repair all these injuries. Françoise found him already stopping up the clefts with rubbish and moss.

"Father," said she, "you are wanted."

And she wept, at last, as she told him what she had just heard. Père Merlier tossed his head. People were not shot in such a summary fashion. The matter must be looked after. He re-entered the mill, with his silent and tranquil air. When the officer demanded of him provisions for his men, he replied that the inhabitants of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be treated roughly, and that nothing would be obtained from them if violence were employed. He would see to everything, but on condition that he was not interfered with. The officer at first seemed irritated by his calm tone; then, he gave way before the old man's

short and clear words. He even called him back and asked him:

"What is the name of that wood opposite?"

"The forest of Sauval."

"What is its extent?"

The miller looked at him fixedly.

"I do not know," he answered.

And he went away. An hour later, the contribution of war in provisions and money, demanded by the officer, was in the courtyard of the mill. Night came on. Françoise watched with anxiety the movements of the soldiers. She hung about the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. Towards seven o'clock, she experienced a poignant emotion. She saw the officer enter the prisoner's apartment, and, for a quarter of an hour, heard their voices in loud conversation. For an instant, the officer reappeared upon the threshold to give an order in German, which she did not understand; but, when twelve men ranged themselves in the courtyard, their guns on their shoulders, she trembled and felt as if about to faint. All then was over: the execution was going to take place. The twelve men stood there ten minutes, Dominique's voice continuing to be raised in a tone of violent refusal. Finally, the officer came out, saying, as he roughly shut the door:

"Very well; reflect. I give you until to-morrow morning."

And, with a gesture, he ordered the twelve men to break ranks. Françoise was stupefied. Père Merlier,

who had been smoking his pipe and looking at the platoon simply with an air of curiosity, took her by the arm with paternal gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

"Be calm," said he, "and try to sleep. To-morrow, when it is light, we will see what can be done."

As he withdrew, he prudently locked her in. It was his opinion that women are good for nothing, and that they spoil everything when they take a hand in a serious affair. But Françoise did not retire. She sat for a long while upon the side of her bed, listening to the noises of the house. The German soldiers, encamped in the courtyard, sang and laughed; they must have been eating and drinking until eleven o'clock, for the racket did not cease an instant. In the mill itself, heavy footsteps resounded from time to time, without doubt those of the sentinels who were being relieved. But she was interested most by the sounds she could distinguish in the apartment beneath her chamber. Many times she stretched herself out at full length and put her ear to the floor. That apartment was the one in which Dominique was confined. He must have been walking back and forth from the window to the wall, for she long heard the regular cadence of his steps. Then, deep silence ensued; he had, doubtless, seated himself. Finally, every noise ceased and all was as if asleep. When slumber appeared to her to have settled on the house, she opened her window as gently as possible and leaned her elbows on the sill.

Without, the night had a warm serenity. The slen-

der crescent of the moon, which was sinking behind the forest of Sauval, lighted up the country with the glimmer of a night-lamp. The lengthened shadows of the tall trees barred the meadows with black, while the grass in uncovered spots assumed the softness of greenish velvet. But Françoise did not pause to admire the mysterious charms of the night. She examined the country, searching for the sentinels whom the Germans had posted obliquely. She clearly saw their shadows extending like the rounds of a ladder along the Morelle. Only one was before the mill, on the other shore of the river, beside a willow the branches of which dipped in the water. Françoise saw him plainly. He was a tall man and was standing motionless, his face turned towards the sky, with the dreamy air of a shepherd.

When she had carefully inspected the locality, she again seated herself on her bed. She remained there an hour, deeply absorbed. Then, she listened once more: there was not a sound in the mill. She returned to the window and glanced out; but, doubtless, one of the horns of the moon, which was still visible behind the trees, made her uneasy, for she resumed her waiting attitude. At last, she thought the proper time had come. The night was as black as jet; she could no longer see the sentinel opposite; the country spread out like a pool of ink. She strained her ear for an instant and made her decision. Passing near the window, was an iron ladder, the bars fastened to the wall, which mounted from the wheel to the garret, and

formerly enabled the millers to reach certain machinery; afterwards, the mechanism had been altered, and for a long while, the ladder had been hidden under the thick ivy which covered that side of the mill.

Françoise bravely climbed out of her window and grasped one of the bars of the ladder. She began to descend. Her skirts embarrassed her greatly. Suddenly a stone was detached from the wall and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped, with an icy shiver of fear. Then, she realized that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, would drown every noise she might make, and she descended more courageously, feeling the ivy with her foot, assuring herself that the rounds were firm. When she was at the height of the chamber which served as Dominique's prison, she paused. An unforeseen difficulty nearly caused her to lose all her courage: the window of the chamber was not directly below that of her apartment. She hung off from the ladder, but, when she stretched out her arm, her hand encountered only the wall. Must she, then, ascend without pushing her plan to completion? Her arms were fatigued; the murmur of the Morelle beneath her commenced to make her dizzy. Then, she tore from the wall little fragments of plaster and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear; he was, doubtless, asleep. She crumbled more plaster from the wall, scraping the skin off her fingers. She was utterly exhausted; she felt herself falling backwards, when Dominique, at last, softly opened the window.

"It is I!" murmured she. "Catch me quickly; I am falling!"

It was the first time that she had addressed him familiarly. Leaning out, he seized her and drew her into the chamber. There, she gave vent to a flood of tears, stifling her sobs that she might not be heard. Then, by a supreme effort, she calmed herself.

"Are you guarded?" asked she, in a low voice.

Dominique, still stupefied at seeing her thus, nodded his head affirmatively, pointing to the door. On the other side they heard some one snoring; the sentinel, yielding to sleep, had thrown himself on the floor, against the door, arguing that, by disposing himself thus, the prisoner could not escape.

"You must fly," resumed Françoise, excitedly. "I have come to beg you to do so and to bid you farewell."

But he did not seem to hear her. He repeated:

"What! is it you, is it you? Oh! what fear you caused me! You might have killed yourself!"

He seized her hands; he kissed them.

"How I love you, Françoise!" murmured he. "You are as courageous as good. I had only one dread: that I should die without seeing you again. But you are here, and now they can shoot me. When I have passed a quarter of an hour with you, I shall be ready."

Little by little, he had drawn her to him, and she leaned her head upon his shoulder. The danger made them dearer to each other. They forgot everything in that warm clasp.

"Ah! Françoise," resumed Dominique, in a caressing voice, "this is Saint-Louis' Day, the day so long awaited of our marriage. Nothing has been able to separate us, since we are both here alone, faithful to the appointment. Is not this our wedding morning?"

"Yes, yes," repeated she, "it is our wedding morning."

They tremblingly exchanged a kiss. But, all at once, she disengaged herself from Dominique's arms; she remembered the terrible reality.

"You must fly, you must fly," whispered she. "There is not a minute to be lost!"

And, as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to clasp her again, she said, tenderly:

"Oh! I implore you to listen to me! If you die, I shall die also! In an hour it will be light. I want you to go at once."

Then, rapidly, she explained her plan. The iron ladder descended to the mill wheel; there he could climb down the buckets and get into the boat which was hidden away in a nook. Afterwards, it would be easy for him to reach the other bank of the river and escape.

"But what of the sentinels?" asked he.

"There is only one, opposite, at the foot of the first willow."

"What if he should see me and attempt to give an alarm?"

Françoise shivered. She placed in his hand a knife she had brought with her. There was a brief silence.

"What is to become of your father and yourself?" resumed Dominique. "No, I cannot fly! When I am gone, those soldiers will, perhaps, massacre you both! You do not know them. They offered me my life if I would consent to guide them through the forest of Sauval. When they discover my escape, they will be capable of anything!"

The young girl did not stop to argue. She said, simply, in reply to all the reasons he advanced:

"Out of love for me, fly! If you love me, Dominique, do not remain here another moment!"

Then, she promised to climb back to her chamber. No one would know that she had helped him. She finally threw her arms around him, to convince him with an embrace, with a burst of extraordinary love. He was vanquished. He asked but one more question:

"Can you swear to me that your father knows what you have done and that he advises me to fly?"

"My father sent me!" answered Françoise, boldly.

She told a falsehood. At that moment, she had only one immense need: to know that he was safe, to escape from the abominable thought that the sun would be the signal for his death. When he was far away every misfortune might fall upon her; that would seem delightful to her, from the moment he was secure. The selfishness of her tenderness desired that he should live, before everything.

"Very well," said Dominique; "I will do what you wish."

They said nothing more. Dominique re-opened the

window. But, suddenly, a sound froze them. The door was shaken, and they thought that it was about to be opened. Evidently, a patrol had heard their voices. Standing, locked in each other's arms, they waited in unspeakable anguish. The door was shaken a second time, but it did not open. They uttered low sighs of relief; they comprehended that the soldier who was asleep against the door must have turned over. In fact, silence succeeded; the snoring was resumed.

Dominique exacted that Françoise should ascend to her chamber before he departed. He clasped her in his arms and bade her a mute adieu. Then, he aided her to seize the ladder and clung to it in his turn. But he refused to descend a single round until convinced that she was in her apartment. When Françoise had entered her window, she let fall, in a voice as light as a breath:

"Au revoir, my love!"

She leaned her elbows on the sill and strove to follow Dominique with her eyes. The night was yet very dark. She searched for the sentinel, but could not see him; the willow alone made a pale stain in the midst of the gloom. For an instant, she heard the sound produced by Dominique's body in passing along the ivy. Then, the wheel cracked, and there was a slight agitation in the water which told her that the young man had found the boat. A moment afterwards, she distingushed the sombre silhouette of the bateau on the gray surface of the Morelle. Terrible

anguish again seized upon her. Each instant, she thought she heard the sentinel's cry of alarm; the smallest sounds scattered through the gloom seemed to her the hurried tread of soldiers, the clatter of weapons, the charging of guns. Nevertheless, the seconds elapsed and the country maintained its profound peace. Dominique must have reached the other side of the river. Françoise saw nothing more. The silence was majestic. She heard a shuffling of feet, a hoarse cry and the hollow fall of a body. Afterwards, the silence grew deeper. Then, as if she had felt Death pass by, she stood, chilled through and through, staring into the thick night.

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

AT dawn, a clamor of voices shook the mill. Père Merlier opened the door of Françoise's chamber. She went down into the courtyard, pale and very calm. But, there, she could not repress a shiver, as she saw the corpse of a Prussian soldier, stretched out on a cloak beside the well.

Around the body, troops gesticulated, uttering cries of fury. Many of them shook their fists at the village. Meanwhile, the officer had summoned Père Merlier as the mayor of the commune.

"Look!" said he to him, in a voice almost choking with anger. "There lies one of our men who was found assassinated upon the bank of the river. We must make a terrible example, and I count on you to aid us in discovering the murderer."

"As you choose," answered the miller, with his usual stoicism; "but you will find it no easy task."

The officer stooped and drew aside a part of the cloak which hid the face of the dead man. Then, appeared a horrible wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat, and the weapon had remained in the cut. It was a kitchen knife with a black handle.

"Examine that knife," said the officer to Père Merlier; "perhaps, it will help us in our search."

The old man gave a start, but recovered control of himself immediately. He replied, without moving a muscle of his face:

"Everybody in the district has similar knives. Doubtless, your man was weary of fighting and put an end to his own life. It looks like it!"

"Mind what you say!" cried the officer, furiously. "I do not know what prevents me from setting fire to the four corners of the village!"

Happily, in his rage, he did not notice the deep trouble pictured on Françoise's countenance. She had been forced to sit down on a stone bench near the well. Despite herself, her eyes were fixed upon the corpse, stretched out on the ground almost at her feet. It was that of a tall and handsome man, who resembled Dominique, with flaxen hair and blue eyes. This resemblance made her heart ache. She thought that, perhaps, the dead soldier had left behind him, in Germany, a sweetheart who would weep her eyes out for him. She recognized her knife in the throat of the murdered man. She had killed him.

The officer was talking of striking Rocreuse with terrible measures, when soldiers came running to him. Dominique's escape had just been discovered. It caused an extreme agitation. The officer went to the apartment in which the prisoner had been confined, looked out of the window which had remained open, understood everything and returned exasperated.

Père Merlier seemed greatly vexed by Dominique's flight.

"The imbecile!" he muttered. "He has ruined all!"

Françoise heard him and was overcome with anguish. But the miller did not suspect her of complicity in the affair. He tossed his head, saying to her in an undertone:

"We are in a nice scrape!"

"It was that wretch who assassinated the soldier! I am sure of it!" cried the officer. "He has undoubtedly reached the forest. But he must be found for us, or the village shall pay for him!"

Turning to the miller, he said:

"See here; you ought to know where he is hidden!"

Père Merlier laughed silently, pointing to the wide stretch of wooded hills.

"Do you expect to find a man in there?" said he.

"Oh! there must be nooks there with which you are acquainted. I will give you ten men. You must guide them."

"As you please. But it will take a week to search all the woods in the vicinity."

The old man's tranquillity enraged the officer. In fact, the latter comprehended the absurdity of this search. At that moment, he saw Françoise, pale and trembling, on the bench. The anxious attitude of the young girl struck him. He was silent for an instant, during which he in turn examined the miller and his daughter.

At length, he demanded roughly of the old man:

"Is not that fellow your child's lover?"

Père Merlier grew livid, and seemed about to hurl

himself upon the officer to strangle him. He stiffened himself, but made no answer. Françoise buried her face in her hands.

"Yes, that's it!" continued the Prussian, "and you or your daughter helped him to escape! One of you is his accomplice! For the last time, will you give him up to us?"

The miller uttered not a word. He turned away and looked into space with an air of indifference, as if the officer had not addressed him. This brought the latter's rage to a head.

"Very well!" shouted he. "You shall be shot in his place!"

And he again ordered out the platoon of execution. Père Merlier remained as stoical as ever. He hardly even shrugged his shoulders; all this drama appeared to him in bad taste. Without doubt, he did not believe that they would shoot a man so lightly. But, when the platoon drew up before him, he said, gravely:

"So, it is serious, is it? Go on with your bloody work, then! If you must have a victim, I will do as well as another!"

But Françoise started up, terrified, stammering:

"In pity, Monsieur, do no harm to my father! Kill me in his stead! I aided Dominique to fly! I alone am guilty!"

"Hush, my child!" cried Père Merlier. "Why do you tell an untruth? She passed the night locked in her chamber, Monsieur. She tells a falsehood, I assure you!"

"No, I do not tell a falsehood!" resumed the young girl, ardently. "I climbed out of my window and went down the iron ladder; I urged Dominique to fly. This is the truth, the whole truth!"

The old man became very pale. He saw clearly in her eyes that she did not lie, and her story terrified him. Ah! these children, with their hearts, how they spoil everything! Then, he grew angry and exclaimed:

"She is mad; do not heed her. She tells you stupid tales. Come, finish your work!"

She still protested. She knelt, clasping her hands. The officer tranquilly watched this dolorous struggle.

"Mon Dieu!" said he, at last, "I take your father because I have not the other. Find the fugitive and the old man shall be set at liberty!"

She gazed at him with staring eyes, astonished at the atrocity of the proposition.

"How horrible!" murmured she. "Where do you think I can find Dominique at this hour? He has departed; I know no more about him."

"Come, make your choice—him or your father."

"Oh! mon Dieu! how can I choose! If I knew where Dominique was, I could not choose! You are cutting my heart. I would rather die at once. Yes, it would be the sooner over. Kill me, I implore you, kill me!"

This scene of despair and tears finally made the officer impatient. He cried out:

"Enough! I will be merciful: I consent to give you two hours. If, in that time, your lover is not here, your father will be shot in his place!"

He caused Père Merlier to be taken to the chamber which had served as Dominique's prison. The old man demanded tobacco and began to smoke. Upon his impassible face not the slightest emotion was visible. But, when alone, as he smoked, he shed two big tears which ran slowly down his cheeks. His poor, dear child, how she was suffering!

Françoise remained in the middle of the courtyard. Prussian soldiers passed, laughing. Some of them spoke to her, uttered jokes she could not understand. She stared at the door through which her father had disappeared. With a slow movement she put her hand to her forehead, as if to prevent it from bursting.

The officer turned upon his heel, saying:

"You have two hours. Try to utilize them."

She had two hours. This phrase buzzed in her ears. Then, mechanically, she quitted the courtyard; she walked straight ahead. Where should she go?—what should she do? She did not even try to make a decision, because she well understood the inutility of her efforts. However, she wished to see Dominique. They could have an understanding together; they might, perhaps, find an expedient. And, amid the confusion of her thoughts, she went down to the shore of the Morelle, which she crossed below the sluice, at a spot where there were huge stones. Her feet led her beneath the first willow, in the corner of the meadow. As she stooped, she saw a pool of blood which made her turn pale. It was there the murder had been committed. She followed the track of Dominique in

the trodden grass; he must have run, for she perceived a line of long footprints stretching across the meadow. Then, further on, she lost these traces. But, in a neighboring field, she thought she found them again. The new trail conducted her to the edge of the forest, where every indication was effaced.

Françoise, nevertheless, plunged beneath the trees. It solaced her to be alone. She sat down for an instant; but, at the thought that time was passing, she leaped to her feet. How long had it been since she left the mill? Five minutes?—half an hour? She had lost all conception of time. Perhaps, Dominique had concealed himself in a copse she knew of, where they had, one afternoon, eaten filberts together. She hastened to the copse, searched it. Only a blackbird flew away, uttering its soft, sad note. Then, she thought he might have taken refuge in a hollow of the rocks, where it had sometimes been his custom to lie in wait for game; but the hollow of the rocks was empty. What good was it to hunt for him?—she would never find him; but, little by little, the desire to discover him took entire possession of her, and she hastened her steps. The idea that he might have climbed a tree suddenly occurred to her. She advanced with uplifted eyes, and, that he might be made aware of her presence, she called him every fifteen or twenty steps. Cuckoos answered; a breath of wind which passed through the branches made her believe that he was there and was descending. Once, she even imagined she saw him; she stopped, almost

choked, and wished to fly. What was she to say to him? Had she come to take him back to be shot? Oh! no, she would not tell him what had happened. She would cry out to him to escape, not to remain in the neighborhood. Then, the thought that her father was waiting for her gave her a sharp pain. She fell upon the turf, weeping, crying aloud:

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Why am I here!"

She was mad to have come. And, as if seized with fear, she ran, she sought to leave the forest. Three times, she deceived herself; she thought she never again would find the mill, when she entered a meadow just opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she saw the village, she paused. Was she going to return alone?

She was still hesitating, when a voice softly called:

"Françoise! Françoise!"

And she saw Dominique, who had raised his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him! Did Heaven wish his death? She restrained a cry; she let herself glide into the ditch.

"Are you searching for me?" asked the young man.

"Yes," answered she, her brain in a whirl, not knowing what she said.

"What has happened?"

She lowered her eyes and stammered:

"Nothing. I was uneasy; I wanted to see you."

Then, reassured, he explained to her that he had resolved not to go away. He was doubtful about the safety of herself and her father. Those Prussian wretches were fully capable of taking vengeance upon

women and old men. But everything was getting on well. He added, with a laugh:

"Our wedding will take place in a week—I am sure of it."

Then, as she remained overwhelmed, he grew grave again and said:

"But what ails you? You are concealing something from me!"

"No; I swear it to you. I am out of breath from running."

He embraced her, saying that it was imprudent for them to be talking, and he wished to climb out of the ditch to return to the forest. She restrained him. She trembled.

"Listen," said she: "it would, perhaps, be wise for you to remain where you are. No one is searching for you; you have nothing to fear."

"Françoise, you are concealing something from me," repeated he.

Again she swore that she was hiding nothing. She had simply wished to know that he was near her. And she stammered forth still further reasons. She seemed so strange to him that he now could not be induced to flee. Besides, he had faith in the return of the French. Troops had been seen in the direction of Sauval.

"Ah! let them hurry, let them get here as soon as possible!" murmured she, fervently.

At that moment, eleven o'clock sounded from the belfry of Rocreuse. The strokes were clear and

distinct. She arose, with a terrified look; two hours had passed since she quitted the mill.

"Hear me," said she, rapidly: "if we have need of you, I will wave my handkerchief from my chamber window."

And she departed on a run, while Dominique, very uneasy, stretched himself out upon the edge of the ditch to watch the mill. As she was about to enter Rocreuse, Françoise met an old beggar, Père Bontemps, who knew everybody in the district. He bowed to her; he had just seen the miller in the midst of the Prussians; then, making the sign of the cross, and muttering broken words, he went on his way.

"The two hours have passed," said the officer when Françoise appeared.

Père Merlier was there, seated upon the bench, beside the well. He was smoking. The young girl again begged, wept, sank on her knees. She wished to gain time. The hope of seeing the French return had increased in her, and, while lamenting, she thought she heard in the distance the measured tramp of an army. Oh! if they would come, if they would deliver them all!

"Listen, Monsieur," said she: "an hour, another hour; you can grant us another hour!"

But the officer remained inflexible. He even ordered two men to seize her and take her away, that they might quietly proceed with the execution of the old man. Then, a frightful struggle took place in Françoise's heart. She could not allow her father to

be thus assassinated. No, no; she would die rather with Dominique. She was running towards her chamber, when Dominique himself entered the courtyard.

The officer and the soldiers uttered a shout of triumph. But the young man, calmly, with a somewhat severe look, went up to Françoise, as if she had been the only person present.

"You did wrong," said he. "Why did you not bring me back? It remained for Père Bontemps to tell me everything. But I am here!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE FRENCH.

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon. Great black clouds, the trail of some neighboring storm, had slowly filled the sky. The yellow heavens, the brass covered uniforms, had changed the valley of Rocreuse, so gay in the sunlight, into a den of cut-throats full of sinister gloom. The Prussian officer had contented himself with causing Dominique to be imprisoned, without announcing what fate he reserved for him. Since noon, Françoise had been torn by terrible anguish. Despite her father's entreaties, she would not quit the courtyard. She was awaiting the French. But the hours sped on, night was approaching, and she suffered the more as all the time gained did not seem to be likely to change the frightful dénouement.

About three o'clock, the Prussians made their preparations for departure. For an instant past, the officer had, as on the previous day, shut himself up with Dominique. Françoise realized that the young man's life was in the balance. She clasped her hands, she prayed. Père Merlier, beside her, maintained silence and the rigid attitude of an old peasant, who does not struggle against fate.

"Oh! mon Dieu! oh! mon Dieu!" murmured Françoise, "they are going to kill him!"

The miller drew her to him, and took her on his knees as if she had been a child.

At that moment, the officer came out, while, behind him, two men brought Dominique.

"Never! never!" cried the latter. "I am ready to die!"

"Think well," resumed the officer. "The service you refuse me another will render us. I am generous: I offer you your life. I want you simply to guide us through the forest to Montredon. There must be pathways leading there."

Dominique was silent.

"So, you persist in your infatuation, do you?"

"Kill me and end all this!" replied the young man.

Françoise, her hands clasped, supplicated him from afar. She had forgotten everything; she would have advised him to commit an act of cowardice. But Père Merlier seized her hands that the Prussians might not see her wild gestures.

"He is right," whispered he: "it is better to die!"

The platoon of execution was there. The officer awaited a sign of weakness on Dominique's part. He still expected to conquer him. No one spoke. In the distance violent crashes of thunder were heard. Oppressive heat weighed upon the country. But, suddenly, amid the silence, a cry broke forth:

"The French! the French!"

Yes, the French were at hand. Upon the Sauval highway, at the edge of the wood, the line of red pantaloons could be distinguished. In the mill there

was an extraordinary agitation. The Prussian soldiers ran hither and thither, with guttural exclamations. Not a shot had yet been fired.

"The French! the French!" cried Françoise, clapping her hands.

She was wild with joy. She escaped from her father's grasp; she laughed and tossed her arms in the air. At last, they had come and come in time, since Dominique was still alive!

A terrible platoon fire, which burst upon her ears like a clap of thunder, caused her to turn. The officer muttered between his teeth:

"Before everything, let us settle this affair!"

And, with his own hand pushing Dominique against the wall of a shed, he ordered his men to fire. When Françoise looked, Dominique lay upon the ground, with blood streaming from his neck and shoulders.

She did not weep; she stood stupefied. Her eyes grew fixed and she sat down under the shed, a few paces from the body. She stared at it, wringing her hands. The Prussians had seized Père Merlier as a hostage.

It was a stirring combat. The officer had rapidly posted his men, comprehending that he could not beat a retreat without being cut to pieces. Hence, he would fight to the last. Now, the Prussians defended the mill and the French attacked it. The fusillade began with unusual violence. For half an hour, it did not cease. Then, a hollow sound was heard, and a ball broke a main branch of the old elm. The

French had cannon. A battery, stationed just above the ditch in which Dominique had hidden himself, swept the wide street of Rocreuse. The struggle could not last long.

Ah! the poor mill! Balls pierced it in every part. Half of the roof was carried away. Two walls were battered down. But it was on the side of the Morelle that the destruction was most lamentable. The ivy, torn from the tottering edifice, hung like rags; the river was encumbered with wrecks of all kinds, and, through a breach, was visible Françoise's chamber with its bed, the white curtains of which were carefully closed. Shot followed shot; the old wheel received two balls and gave vent to an agonizing groan: the buckets were borne off by the current, the framework was crushed. The soul of the gay mill had left it!

Then, the French began the assault. There was a furious fight with swords and bayonets. Beneath the rust-colored sky, the valley was choked with the dead. The broad meadows had a wild look, with their tall, isolated trees and their hedges of poplars which stained them with shade. To the right and to the left, the forests were like the walls of an ancient amphitheatre which enclosed the fighting gladiators, while the springs, the fountains and the flowing brooks seemed to sob amid the panic of the country.

Beneath the shed, Françoise still sat near Dominique's body; she had not moved. Père Merlier had received a slight wound. The Prussians were

exterminated, but the ruined mill was on fire in a dozen places. The French rushed into the courtyard, headed by their captain. It was his first success of the war. His face beamed with triumph. He waved his sword, shouting:

"Victory! victory!"

On seeing the wounded miller, who was endeavoring to comfort Françoise, and noticing the body of Dominique, his joyous look changed to one of sadness. Then, he knelt beside the young man, and, tearing open his blouse, put his hand to his heart.

"Thank God!" he cried, "it is yet beating! Send for the surgeon!"

At the captain's words, Françoise leaped to her feet.

"There is hope!" she cried. "Oh! tell me there is hope!"

At that moment the surgeon appeared. He made a hasty examination, and said:

"The young man is severely hurt, but life is not extinct, he can be saved!"

By the surgeon's orders, Dominique was transported to a neighboring cottage, where he was placed in bed. His wounds were dressed, restoratives were administered, and he soon recovered consciousness. When he opened his eyes, he saw Françoise sitting beside him and, through the open window, caught sight of Père Merlier talking with the French captain. He passed his hand over his forehead with a bewildered air, and said:

"They did not kill me, after all!"

"No," replied Françoise. "The French came and their surgeon saved you."

Père Merlier turned and said through the window: "No talking yet, my young ones!"

In due time Dominique was entirely restored, and, when peace again blessed the land he wedded his beloved Françoise.

The mill was rebuilt, and Père Merlier had a new wheel upon which to bestow whatever tenderness was not engrossed by his daughter and her husband.

THE END.

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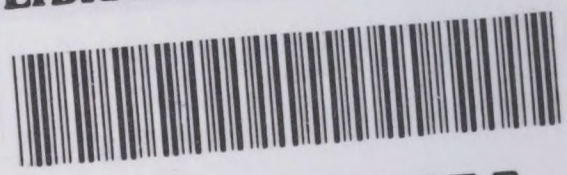

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